
ROSE
AND
RUE





ROSE AND RUE.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. COMPTON READE.

> "She was a maiden of most quiet face,
> Tender of speech, and had no hardihood,
> But was nigh feeble of her fearful blood;
> Her mercy in her was so marvellous."
> . . . .
> SWINBURNE'S "ST. DOROTHY."

> "To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
> Every inch of space is a miracle,
> Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
> Every cubic foot of the interior swarms with the same;
> Every spear of grass, the frames, limbs, organs of men and women, and all
> that concerns them,
> All these to me are unspeakably perfect miracles."
> WALT WHITMAN'S "MIRACLES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.
1874.

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CHAPTER I.

CHANCE CHARITY.

BEGUILED by pleasant talk—Robert was a rare *raconteur*, could carry you along with him whither he would, east or west, north or south, high as the heavens, low as, shall we say, the last level of a Cornish copper-mine, nothing was too mean for him to notice, nothing so lofty that he could not grasp it—beguiled by pleasant talk, then, the evening ended ere in the estimation of one young person, at least, it had well begun; yes, though that young person was so silent and demure, and to all appearance wrapt in self.

"I hope, sir," said Jacob, when Robert rose to get his candle, which Tryphena, according to custom, had placed upon the dresser, "that you will make my house your home as long as ever it may please you; also that you will treat my property as your own," with quite Oriental munificence.

"Oh, thanks," replied Robert, somewhat startled by this unlooked-for display of greatness, "I shall be delighted to accept your hospitality for a week or two; then I think I must set my face northwards. Good-night, Miss Fowke."

"Good-night, sir," said Aunt Rachel, "and God bless you. Words can't tell how glad I am to see you so well. Tryphena, child, get a spill."

And "Tryphena child" got one, and lighted it obediently, promptly, as might a servant. What else was she?

"Thank you," said Robert, and smiled a smile worth a million thank-yous—one of those rare, sweet smiles which, asserted Martha Tapp, seemed "to take a body's senses clean away, just like a quart o' new cider."

But she took no heed thereof; she was blowing hard at that bit of charred paper.

Her father eyed her oddly from beneath contracted brows.

"Come," exclaimed he, "if you've nothing better to do than that, you can go to bed; you know your way, sir," this to Robert, who had already reached the door.

"Of a truth," was the laughing answer. "Good-night, Tryphena."

"Good-night, sir," she replied, absently, jarred by her father's tone—it was seldom that he spoke crossly to her; and Robert disappeared.

In a little while the old house stood silent as the church, the square battlemented tower of which was now just visible among the trees owing to lack of leaves. Each door was locked and barred—each window shuttered. Aunt Rachel, having baited the rat-trap and put out the kitchen fire, had, rushlight in hand, crept stealthily up the back stairs, to the attic wherein she now nightly sought repose. Tryphena had retired to her small chamber. Mr. Fowke's snores rose roofwards, continuous, full-toned;—peace reigned.

But though to sleep is indubitably not merely the privilege, but the duty of those

who by hard work have earned right of rest, I find, thus perversely does mind deal by matter, that the more tired you are, the less willingly does slumber weave her spells. Mr. Valoynes had that day ridden over thirty miles, Tryphena had, as you are already aware, worked hard from daybreak, and yet at midnight they were both awake—broad awake—and as busy thinking as it was well possible for them to be.

"It must be the moonlight, surely," exclaimed the girl, starting up in bed, wearied out by incessant pondering—pondering guiltless alike of beginning or end, source or aim. "Perhaps if I draw the curtains it will be better."

And she arose with that intention. Aunt Rachel would not let her have a blind lest "it should get her into idle habits of a morning."

But face to face with mighty nature, Tryphena stood as one bewitched. It was a lovely night—not a cloud to be seen, save near the moon, where lay soft, mist-like masses—white, but edged with that delicate pale brown, which is, I think, quite the goodliest tint held by earth or sky, and which one Rembrandt has

contrived to match with moderate success. Above gleamed the stars, below glittered the gemmed grass. Trees, farm buildings—even the small shrubs upon the lawn, stood out distinct as at high noon, bathed in strong silvery light, made great with shade. "How exquisite!" said Tryphena, clasping her cold hands —there would be ice and to spare to-morrow— "how wonderful!" and smiled for slow, deep, delight; and it was past one, and she would have to be dressed by six—dressed and down stairs, brandishing broom and dustpan. Truly Aunt Rachel had cause to dwell on the universality of evil.

No fine feeling for natural beauty, if it were not the beauty of blue eyes and soft, dark curling hair, and an expression so sweet that it made a man sigh but to think thereon, drove sleep from Robert's pillow, however. His reflections were occasioned by matters weightier than moonshine. During his absence, he had learnt much—much concerning ore, much concerning lace, much concerning pilchards; had become acquainted with the ways of miners, lacemakers, and fishermen. But in the sum total of his recently-acquired

knowledge was included an item of even greater importance than any one of these—he had learnt to know himself, to see accurately with the eye of reason what were his surroundings, in which direction bent the road of the future. And being thus, as it were, sharpened and made able to bore through the alluvial deposit of appearance to the rocky bed of meaning, Jacob's change of manner supplied him with no meagre allowance of food for thought. That his manner had changed was as certain as that the sun rose and set. "When I left," meditated Robert, drawing the bed-clothes over his head—the fire had gone out, and the night air rushed chilly down the chimney (what would he have said, I wonder, had he known that at that moment stood, not a hundred yards off, a small white maiden scantily clad, barefooted, gazing upwards at the sky—the thrall of ecstasy?—"when I left," pondered he, "that man, I feel certain, would have been well content never to have seen my face again; now he presses me to make his house my home—it is most amazing. I cannot account for it!"

Nor did protracted consideration dissipate the mystery.

Nevertheless the fact, as a fact, was pleasureful—sweet to the memory, and well-fitted to become the basis of not one, but many of those aërial structures wherein so blissfully do dwell the creatures of our imaginations—ourselves—and that other he or she with whom we spend so large a portion of our time, poor misused, squandered time. Asleep, Robert slept happily enough.

The following day was bright as steel, as cold also.

"The hounds meet at Evershot this morning," observed Jacob, as he added milk to the steaming bowl of porridge wherewith it was his wont to pave the way for breakfast; "that's Lord Ilchester's place, as of course you know, sir," addressing Robert; "I thought perhaps you might like to ride over."

But Robert shook his head.

"No," said he, "I don't feel much inclined for hard exercise to-day, neither does Silvertail, I imagine. He has had rather more work than he has fancied of late. That last ten miles was wofully against the collar."

"Do him good," observed Jacob, coolly; "what were beasts made for but to work? and why shouldn't one beast work as well as another? There ain't much difference actually, I expect, 'twixt him and one of my cart-horses; merely an inch or two of hair about the fetlock, and maybe half a foot or so of neck,—and they work—pretty smart."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tryphena, "that isn't a bit true. Silvertail's a gentleman!"

"So he is," laughed Robert, "I never heard a better definition."

And Jacob smiled grimly.

"Ay," said he, "and he's well lodged—in a stable."

"Dear—dear!" broke forth Aunt Rachel, foreseeing trouble, "what a deal of words about nothing! Mr. Valoynes, you'll take a bit more bacon?"

"Thank you," said Robert, and held out his plate. He was no stranger to his host's views on social subjects.

Still, natural hindrances allowed for, a man's prejudices are very often as little the result of personal preference as his nose,—it was plain that Jacob wanted to be civil, and not only

civil, but very civil; wherefore, after a slight pause, conversation flowed briskly as before.

"You haven't told me anything about Mr. Latchet, though," remarked Robert, when the marvels, "amusing somethings," and casualties, including the untimely and touching demise of a sow on whom much depended, especially the nourishment and culture of eleven young pigs, who now squeaked forlorn, the victims of a ruthless destiny, had dwindled to a close—"I hope he is still in the full possession of his powers—that he has not caught cold during his journeyings to and fro. The loss of his voice would be to him a very serious misfortune."

"And to everybody else," added Aunt Rachel, promptly. "However, I don't think he has felt the weather at all as yet, which to me is a constant wonder, seeing how careless he is, seldom wearing a greatcoat, and always going on foot. But then, the Lord has an eye unto His own!"

"A man," observed Mr. Fowke, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, "may lose what's more needful than a voice."

"That depends on the use he makes of it," retorted his sister.

"Yes," said Robert. "For instance—think of Hamlet with a cold in his head, or Romeo with a sore throat."

"Oh, them!" replied Jacob, contemptuously —"they're foreigners. I was speaking of Englishmen."

"Of Mr. Latchet, in fact," smiled Robert, who was singularly open to impressions, particularly when his curiosity had been excited.

But Mr. Fowke was not to be enticed beyond the limits of discretion. He knew what he meant, and he spoke when and as he pleased. Let no grandee, southern or northern, imagine that his intentions were to be got at one second sooner than he saw fit. When the time for doing came he should do, and do pretty stoutly, too, pretty much to the purpose if he was not mistaken; meanwhile, grandees—southern or northern—could mind their own business.

"There's my gun in that corner," he remarked, nodding towards the fireplace and rising to his feet, "and you'll find some

powder and shot in a pouch that's somewhere about—though where is beyond my telling; and if you can get a pheasant, why"—with a grim smile—"all the better; it'll save butcher's meat. Times are hard enough."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, indignantly, "what ever can you be thinking of? Surely we haven't come to such a pass but that we can get our food without having to roam the woods for it like naked savages?"

Robert laughed loudly; Tryphena laughed too.

"Well, but," argued Jacob, "the times are hard—ain't they, sir? You've been about lately and seen how things are going: don't you agree with me that we ought to be careful?"

"Certainly," replied Robert, "having due regard to justice!"

"Ah!" smiled Aunt Rachel, "you've hit the right nail on the head there, sir. It's all very well to talk, but I like consistency. There's no great wisdom in withholding with your left hand what you're squandering with

your right, that's a kind of saving for which I've got small liking !" with intention.

Mr. Fowke put on his hat.

"Mind that bird," remarked he, gravely, as he reached the door, and therewith went forth unto his labours.

But though by no means insensible to the charms of sport, even when pursued alone, and divested of the supplementary attractions of out-of-doors luncheon and publicity, Mr. Valoynes evinced slack inclination to test the correctness of his eye, the cunning of his hands, and that although the morning was exactly fitted for a trudge by frosted hedge-side, through cone-strewed plantation, though Gran, the black pointer chained up in the stable, was a dog of merit, though the gun made mention of was, so Aunt Rachel said, a first-rate one, and cost twenty pounds last February.

"If you will come," observed he, turning from the window whence he had been gazing at Miss Fowke, as she, mounted high on pattens, her sun-bonnet tilted over her eyes as if it were July, snatched frozen towels off a clothes-line—the work must be got on with

let who would be in the house; not King George himself should stop her from seeing to things—"if you will come," he observed, I repeat, turning to Tryphena, who was mixing Beauty's breakfast, Beauty sitting beside her the while, her forehead puckered up into an expectant frown, her facial contour stern with eagerness—"I will put off writing my letters till after dinner, and start at once. Do!" This walking towards her persuasively.

But she betrayed no sympathy, was not in the least stirred by his desire for her company.

"Dear, no," said she, gravely; "that would not suit me at all. I have a horror of fire-arms!"

"Why," inquired Robert.

"I don't know. Father's pistols always seem to me such great murderous-looking things; and one day when I was a child I took hold of one of them just to see what it was made of, and aunt caught me and gave me a whipping. There, you dreadful greedy dog. Doesn't she eat nastily?—clop, clop, clop!"

Robert remained silent, his eyes bent on

Beauty—his hands in his trousers pocket, his general appearance that of one lost in thought.

At length he looked up—

"I don't believe you're a bit glad to see me!" enounced he, dully, even sullenly—if one must keep parallel with fact—"I daresay it would have been just the same to you if I'd gone straight home."

For a moment or two she held her peace. Then she said, gently, without lifting her eyes, however:

"That is not kind. I do not know why you should say that!" and her voice trembled a little, and the cheek and ear towards him changed colour—changed from milk-white to rose, most beautiful.

"I say it because your manner is so cold," he answered (still in the same dull tone), "because you have hardly spoken ten times to me since I entered the house; and why didn't you answer my letter?"

"How could I?"

"With your hands,—very well," growing warmer. "Day after day did I go to that hateful post-office, and day after day did I hear 'No sir, nothing this morning, sir,' till at

last I gave up going, lest I might strangle the clerk who waited on me!"

"Mr. Valoynes!" exclaimed Tryphena, much shocked, "you quite surprise me!"

"I don't wonder at that," he replied, unhappily, "I surprise myself; but you might have written!"

"No!" rejoined she, firmly—"no! I am only a farmer's daughter and you are a country gentleman. It is very good of you to like me—I think you do like me," glancing up at him momentarily, and smiling just a little.

"Child!" broke forth Robert impetuously—"how can you talk so?"

"Hey day!" cried Aunt Rachel, clattering in—her arms full of linen, her cheeks red as the halves of a pomegranate—"are you two quarrelling? Mr. Valoynes looks as sour—and do just see what that dog's got! Hoo! you brute!" flinging the towels on the table and dashing across the kitchen after Beauty, who, mutton-bone in mouth, made for the other door as quick as her legs could carry her; "whatever can you both have been thinking about? Oh, you vile old thief, just let me get near you!"

But Beauty had no intention of committing any such error of judgment. Having dropped her prize—a shoulder-blade, which she had already gnawed as clean as though a vulture had been at work upon it—she fled precipitately through the hall into the garden, there to await patiently the call of fate.

"It is quite ridiculous," pursued Aunt Rachel, angrily, picking up the bone and replacing it upon the dish whence it had been filched, "that you should be sitting there, and yet that that beast should walk off with just whatever she's a fancy for. I've a great mind to tell your father!"

"No, no!" interposed Robert; "don't do that, Miss Fowke. Tryphena is really not to blame, for I was talking to her and distracting her attention."

"It's doubtful, I think, whether she's got any attention to be distracted," was the prompt rejoinder. "A beautiful shoulder of mutton, and not half-eaten! A pretty thing indeed, if we're to go short, or roam the woods for our victuals, and dogs live on prime joints!"

"If you fed Beauty better," observed Tryphena—not impudently—in mild self-defence,

she would be less inclined to steal. The poor creature is always hungry."

"She'll be hungrier than she is before she's dead," replied Aunt Rachel, coolly. "If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's waste!"

"Give me the gun," exclaimed Robert, who, with the divine selfishness of a man, and a man in love, though he might rail himself, abominated the railing of his fellow-creatures, "and I'll go and see what mischief I can do. One must let the steam off somehow."

"Even," smiled Tryphena, proceeding to search in the cupboard for her father's shot-bag, "in the shape of smoke."

"Well!" ejaculated Miss Fowke, presently, as the garden-gate banged behind him, "of all the gabies—and him turned twenty-six! But I never will believe that men have got the same sense as women. They're well enough up to their ears in dirt, or shooting Frenchmen, or roaring at a parcel of recruits; but as for being serviceable, or having an eye to things——It's a mercy that pheasants are in season!"

And Tryphena said "Yes." What else could she say, not wishing to impugn the wisdom of decrees framed by an all-gracious Providence?

CHAPTER II.

MARRED MUSIC.

"H-R-R-R!" shuddered Mr. Valoynes, turning up his coat tails, and taking a determined stand before the kitchen fire one morning about a week after his return—"I should think this was cold enough to please even you, Miss Fowke."

"My!" said Aunt Rachel, "do you call this cold, and you bred in the north? Why, this is nothing to what we have sometimes. I've known the ice so thick before now that it's had to be boiled in a pot, just like potatoes, before it 'd melt."

Robert turned up the whites of his eyes. He was, in his quick, vigorous way, as fond of luxury, softness, delicacy in his doings, as any man.

"I tell you what," said he, as Tryphena made her appearance, bare-armed, the skirt of her dark print dress pinned round her in a manner which would now excite the envy of milliners, but which was then the acme of disorder, a wooden bowl lately full of grain in her hand, her cheeks as red as holly-berries, the tip of her nose likewise—she had been feeding the fowls—"I want a good long walk. What do you say, Tryphena, to starting directly after dinner, and going over the down to Charwood, and then home by the road—or would that be too far for you? We haven't had one of our tramps yet."

Tryphena looked at Aunt Rachel, a shy smile quivering upon her lips, as though the idea thus suddenly presented for her consideration was not wholly devoid of attraction.

"Well," said Aunt Rachel, noting her hesitation, "have you lost your tongue? Surely you are old enough by now to know what you can do and what you can't."

"It wasn't that," returned the girl; "don't you want me?"

"Suppose I do," was the tart rejoinder; "that don't matter."

"But," interposed Robert, "I'm sure you don't want her very much—not half as much as I do. For take a walk I must, and I hate walking alone."

"But," argued Tryphena, who from long struggling with inclination had come to regard all assertions of individual taste as hollow, and liable to negation, "you walk alone when you are at Kirton."

"Ah, that is different," he replied; "no man can defy fate. I should not walk alone if I could avoid it; if, for instance, Mr. Fowke were my next neighbour."

Aunt Rachel laughed.

"You've got a rare way of putting things, sir," observed she; "to listen to you, one would fancy you'd never met with a man or woman to your liking before you crossed that threshold; and very good it is of you to say so, I'm sure—only one can't quite take it all in."

Robert's face darkened.

"That is your fault, not mine," rejoined he somewhat coldly—the most gracious of us is seldom wholly insensible to the worth of his or her own graciousness, inherent and relative;

and then turning to Tryphena, inquired again whether his ramble was to be enhanced in charm by her society.

"She can go if she likes," remarked Aunt Rachel, hurrying away tray-laden to the scullery; "but if she does go, she will have to make haste, and get on with the work. I'm willing that every one should have their proper share of enjoyment—such enjoyment as it is—but I can't do more than I can."

"Dear, no!" said Tryphena, and unpinned her dress forthwith. She was just a little glad that Mr. Valoynes liked company—of course a big dog would do as well as she would—better in fact, big dogs being for the most part destitute of religious scruples, and limited in their powers of utterance—but still if he would only keep to foreign countries and books, with the exception of one book, she thought she could contrive not to be so very offensive, so very much of a nuisance. And Mr. Valoynes stared at the frost-whitened window, and called Beauty "Poor old woman"—which was to say the least uncalled for, and scarcely what might be expected in a gentleman of his gallant and

even chivalrous way of thinking. But one does well to be cautious.

Dinner over—Aunt Rachel had it on the table half an hour sooner than usual in deference to her guest's desire for an early start; besides, it was not proper for a girl to be out after dark with any man or anywhere, you couldn't tie folks' tongues;—dinner over, I say, Tryphena put on her bonnet and shawl —not her Leghorn bonnet, a brown silk one, ornamented inside with a soft white quilling, fitting close to the face, a quilling Quakerish, of quite infantine simplicity, but wicked— wicked to make one shudder.

"She looks fresh, don't she?" remarked Miss Fowke, as she re-entered the kitchen, redolent of boiled beef and turnips; "there's not many town girls can show a skin like that. Come, you needn't get so red—there's no shame in being clear."

Robert laughed, and rose to his feet. These people amused him mightily. He was laughing all day.

"Where are you bound for?" inquired Jacob, who to the proposed excursion had

raised no demur—had, indeed, rather expressed satisfaction, so far as any definite meaning could be attached to "Humphs," "Has," and other abrupt and characteristic ejaculations, not recognized as yet as integral parts of speech.

"Charwood," responded Tryphena, drawing on her gloves; "at least I think you said so?" appealing to her escort.

"Yes," he answered; "if that won't be too far."

"Oh, no," she smiled. "Why, I walked to Coatham and back the other day—all by myself, too—and I was not very tired; and you know that is eight miles."

"Ay," said Jacob, "that it is—eight long miles. For my part, I wish 'twas eighteen. But you mustn't dawdle. You'll take care of her, sir?"

"Rather!" answered Robert, with a certain pride not wholly inexplicable.

"And you'll not go sitting down," added Aunt Rachel, severely, "or sliding on the ponds, or tearing your clothes in hedges. Remember that dress will have to last you the

whole winter. So if you come back in rags, in rags you'll stay."

"The idea!" exclaimed Tryphena, much outraged, "just as if I was a great tomboy, with no more sense than"——

"Just as if you weren't!" interposed the accuser, straightening her bonnet-strings with energy and earnestness, sufficient being sustained to subdue a kingdom.

And Robert laughed again.

And Mr. Fowke laughed. Even Aunt Rachel herself, the cause of all this merriment, could not forbear a titter, and thus mirthfully did they set out upon their journey, as pretty a young pair as could well be seen away from fashionable quarters.

"Look at Beauty," said Tryphena, as they gained the high road, glancing back over her shoulder. "No, don't! She'll fancy we want her, poor dear. But isn't she clever? Whenever I come down with my bonnet on, she gives a look at me, as much as to say, 'Are you going far?' and she always knows, just as if she saw it in my face. I am so fond of that old dog. If father were to poison her, as he

threatens to sometimes, I think my heart would break."

"Sweet heart," said Robert, tenderly.

"No," she replied, "not sweet at all—quite sour and black; but when I care for things they seem to be one with me, just part and parcel of myself."

Whereto he made answer:

"I wish that you would care for me."

But of this observation she took no notice, seeming engrossed in the pert airs of a "lady dish-washer" who was disporting herself on the road a little way ahead.

Given sunshine, pure air to breathe, ground hard, white, clean as biscuit china to tread upon, the delicate, lace-like beauty of leafless thorn and beech as food for sight, together with the small loveliness of spangled grass and ferns, endless undergrowth of western hedgerows, and a fairly tranquil conscience—what should mar enjoyment?

Not surely eight words spoken at random, tossed to the winds like foam from the crest of a breaker which recedes in breaking. Nay!

Tryphena, her eyes glad—as are the eyes of one other friend of mine—with light bred of

"quiet lands and skies," looked about her, up at the great heaven and down at the great earth, and knew she was content; tripped along briskly, singing in her mind, and knew she was content:—she was so easily pleased, dear child!

"See!" exclaimed she, pointing to an oak in a neighbouring field—a field belonging to Mr. Fowke—"there are some leaves on that tree yet; and this is where we get the 'wine-glasses.' Have you ever seen them? They are so pretty—little scarlet cups growing on bits of wood; but they are seldom to be found before February. Do you have those in the north?"

"I don't know," said Robert; "I have not paid much attention to muscology."

"Nor I," answered Tryphena, "indeed, I don't think I ever heard the word before; but if you care for natural things you soon get to know about them without any teaching. It is wonderful how much a little love does in this world."

"Yes," said Robert, and flicked away a stone with his walking-stick.

Then they turned into the lane, narrow and

carpeted with turf—more of a "riding" than a lane, in fact, which by a gradual ascent, stony in places and precipitous at last, led up on to the downs—vast billowy stretches of grass-land, whereon fed large Roman-nosed sheep, whose legs and shoulders seldom weighed less than eight and twelve pounds, and many of whom had attained the venerable age of four years, owing to the value of their fleeces.

"I am glad you chose this walk," observed Tryphena, as they toiled upward, "because I want to see how the holly-berries are coming on. We always get our Christmasing from the down. Father lets John take the cart, and Martha and I go with great knives. It is such fun; only one gets so scratched. I wish you were going to stay, you might help us."

"I wish I was," returned Robert, promptly; "but if I were to pay heed to the voice of my desires, I should never go away at all!"

"Dear me!" said she, "how odd, and with such a grand home. Why I should have thought you would be dying to get back!"

He smiled.

"Should you really now?" remarked he, somewhat dryly.

"Certainly I should," she returned. "Why, what have we to offer you compared to the things you are accustomed to—not even an arm-chair, scarce a book. Sometimes I feel quite ashamed, and wish we had never known you, we seem so mean."

"Tryphena!" exclaimed Robert, "say another word, and I will shake you—I will, indeed!" and he crossed the road as if to forestall justice.

"No, no!" cried she, running away, "pray don't; I can't bear being shaken. I would rather have my ears boxed any time; besides" —snatching up a stick which having been riven from the hedge by some previous passer-by, had been left lying on the road—"I am not quite defenceless—you had better take care!"

"Then," replied he, sternly, "I will order a post-chaise at Charwood, drive to Dorchester, put you into the London coach, and carry you off to Kirton forthwith. You have no idea how vindictive I can be when I please."

"Say rather how silly," retorted she, and walked on soberly enough. Raillery had its limits, like other things.

It was pleasant on the down, very; there

being but little wind, and the sun still shining brightly as at noon.

"How thankful we ought to be that God has given us legs!" replied Miss Fowke, junior, her eyes bent on a huge holly-bush, glorious with glossiest green, stout with the storms of centuries; "fancy if we were like the worms—we moderate people, who can't afford to keep carriages and horses—whatever should we do?"

"Is that intended to convey that I, who do keep carriages and horses, am like a worm?" inquired Robert, calmly, baring his head to the breeze—a fair, well-shaped head, endowed with much wealth of curling hair.

Tryphena laughed.

"If you like," she answered, and stooped to scrutinize a small yellow shell which had attracted her attention. Truly no common mood was hers this afternoon.

"You are very pert," said Robert, with mock dignity; "what is the matter with you?"

"I have eaten too much dinner," responded she, laughing again—"at least that is what Aunt Rachel would say. She puts down all the

wickedness of you aristocrats to the amount of food and wine you consume. You are like over-fed horses, she says—obedient to neither bit nor bridle, and readier to kick at the spur than wince under it."

"Indeed," smiled Robert; "but I am no Tory, as you know."

"No, she answered—"no," and paused, thoughtfully. "You see," pursued she, at length, "it is not to be wondered at that we west-country folks have such a poor opinion of our betters—we have suffered so because of them."

"You mean long ago, in the days of Jeffreys?"

"Yes. Why, for miles round Shobdon even—and that was quite away from the scene of the insurrection—Mr. Latchet says you couldn't take a walk without seeing some dreadful sight. He knows a great deal about history, and his great-great-great-uncle would have been whipped to death for joining the rebels if he hadn't caught the small-pox, and so got off, because no one dared to come near him!"

"Lucky great-great-great uncle!" observed

Robert, not quite without irony. "By-the-way, I wonder what has become of the Reverend Acts! I trust I was not the cause of his non-appearance on Sunday."

"Dear no!" said Tryphena, "why should you be? Indeed, I doubt whether he is aware of your return. I did not tell him, and I don't think aunt did. The reason he did not come to tea was very simple. He had to visit a dying person at Liss, and so could not spare the time."

"Oh!" said Robert, "I am glad of that. Being carnally inclined myself, I should be sorry to think that I had deprived any one of justly-earned creature comforts."

Tryphena's face lengthened.

"What do you mean," inquired she, gravely —"that Mr. Latchet likes his tea better than our company?"

"It is possible," replied Robert, "that he may like both."

"But I thought you were such friends. Why, I am sure when you were here before you used to talk——"and an expressive pause.

"The man is very well," was the composed

rejoinder. "His creed is not mine; but that does not signify."

"Then," said Tryphena—she was of such a faithful turn; to deal roughly with that which she had once held precious was to her as terrible as for a mother to disown her child; a thing unnatural, monstrous, not to be contemplated save with horror—"why do you pick holes in him?"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Robert; "he has holes enough already, without my adding to the number."

"They are invisible, at all events," retorted the girl promptly.

Whereat he laughed. It was not worth quarrelling about.

"Come," said he, "let's have a race. Do you see that stone trough?"

"Yes," said she, gazing in the direction he indicated.

"Well, a lock of hair to a pair of mittens that you don't get there first. You shall have fifty paces start."

"No," said she, "I won't. I can run as well as you."

He smiled. There was a time when it had

been his favourite winter pastime to meet the Carlisle coach at the cross-roads just three miles from Kirton, keep abreast therewith for the first two miles, gain the next half, and finally pass the winning post—namely, the lodge gates—in time to pull himself together, and nod to the coachman, who, it should be observed, was a man of honour, and never hurried his horses during that quarter of an hour; but boyhood is not manhood, neither the wind and limb of sixteen the wind and limb of six and twenty, save under exceptional circumstances. Still he thought she was too daring.

"Be wise," urged he; "I am sure you don't want to be caught."

"Well, no," she answered, and let him give her the advantage.

A pause, then one, two, three, and they were off. The girl ran swift as any hare, her little feet twinkling in and out of her blown skirts, now seen, now hidden, scarce touching the short grass. A man might well have let her win for sheer gratitude, so gracious was the sight thereof; but Robert set store by victory. On he sped, eager-eyed, as though that sheep-trough were a crown. Stay! that

were a sorry goal—rather the prison-house of liberty.

"Oh!" cried Tryphena, as might cry a hare already tortured by the greyhound's teeth, as he came up with her, and fell panting against his shoulder—"oh!"

"Ha!" he exclaimed, pressing her close to him, "and you were so sure of beating me!"

And then he let her go. Aunt Rachel's trust was not ill placed.

"I did not know," she said, aggrievedly, "that you were so fleet-footed. I can always catch Martha."

Whereat this conqueror laughed. Martha, good soul, was of a build something less than Atalantæan.

But they were still a good half mile from Charwood, which lay like Coatham at the foot of a hill—the shoulder, in fact, of the down they had just traversed; and as Shobdon was—so the sign-post asserted—three miles from Charwood, it behoved them to make haste, if they would reach home by day-light.

Thus, Tryphena, having recovered her breath, and re-tied her bonnet which had fallen back during her scamper—reducing her, she

declared, to the level of crazy creatures and those destitute of proper shelter—they made their way into the steep lane leading to the village without delay, soberly, as though to proceed at any pace other than a walk, to comport themselves on anywise other than that suitable to decorous subjects of a most Christian Majesty—persons well imbued with reverence for limited monarchy and religion as set forth in the Prayer-book of the Church of England—were as contrary to their inclinations and foreign to their powers as to turn somersaults or write plays. It is a strange world.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed Robert, when they were about half-way down this rugged descent, a descent furrowed by autumn rains as a widow's cheeks by tears — "who's this?" and Tryphena, whose eyes had been bent on the uneven ground, looked up to see a man—a man wearing a tall hat and long black cloak, a man apparently dark, and certainly short, picking his way towards them midst ruts and boulders.

"Why," said she, as if surprised, "it's surely the minister!" and therewith blushed. The manner of their meeting reminded her so

forcibly of that other meeting, whereof you had particulars some little while ago.

Robert smiled.

"Yes," replied he, "it is the minister, with out a doubt."

Here Acts, perceiving them, came to a halt.

"How do you do?" exclaimed Robert, flourishing his walking-stick, his face radiant with good-humour.

"How do you do?" responded Mr. Latchet, advancing hand outstretched; "I was, or rather am, on my way to call upon you, if you can make that out. I trust you have sustained no evil effects from your journey;" this shaking hands with Tryphena, as from habit rather than a sense of obligation.

"No," replied Robert, handling his stick barwise, apparently with the covert intention of snapping it in twain—"none. I never felt better in my life."

"Indeed," smiled Acts, "that is well. And how are you, Miss Tryphena—if I may be permitted to make an inquiry so evidently superfluous?" gazing at her with open admiration. She did, indeed, look rarely beautiful—limpid eyed, white-browed, red-lipped as any child;

and through this skin-deep loveliness outshining heavenly innocence:—it was no wonder that men favoured her.

"Oh," said she, blushing hotly—she did wish that people knew better than to stare a poor girl out of countenance—"I am as I always am. What a nice day!"

"Yes," rejoined Acts, glancing upwards; "but cold. Don't you find it so?"

"No," she answered; "but then we have been racing, so I am scarcely a fair judge."

"Really," said the minister—"what, running races?"

"Yes," said Robert; "Tryphena seemed rather unmanageable, so I suggested that she should take a little gentle exercise by way of a corrective."

"Gentle exercise!" echoed she, aggrievedly, "I don't call it gentle exercise at all. Fancy, Mr. Latchet, being chased for quite half a quarter of a mile, with the wind blowing in your face, and your bonnet flying at the back of your head, and——"

"And being caught at last," laughed Robert, triumphantly, "out of breath, panting, dead-beat, with every humiliating accessory which tyranny could devise or servility accomplish."

"Dear me," observed Mr. Latchet, "I don't know which to admire most—your syntax or your intrepidity."

"Admire his syntax," interposed Tryphena; "his intrepidity he admires himself."

Acts laughed rather dryly.

"I wish I had been present at these sports," said he; "I might have acted as umpire."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Tryphena; "you should have run, too;" and therewith she fell a-laughing as though she could never cease. Truly the notion was a little comical; even the minister saw that.

"You wicked girl!" smiled he, "to make fun of your old friend; however, I suppose youth must have its way," sighing. "Well, good-bye; shall I find your aunt at home?"

"Yes," said Tryphena, battling hard for gravity, "and she will be pleased to see you, for she is all alone. Father's at work in The Tumps—levelling I think; the molehills are so tiresome!"

"Indeed!" returned Acts. "Good-day, Mr. Valoynes."

"Good-day," rejoined Robert, and slightly

raised his hat. A brief space, and they proceeded each on their respective ways.

"The blood in that man's veins," observed Robert, glancing back over his shoulder, "is no better than gall, and he looks at you, Tryphena, as if he could eat you."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed she, promptly —"how absurd. I do wish you would not be so stupid!" in a tone of some distress; "I cannot think what makes you say such things."

"Can't you?" he smiled, and tried to catch sight of her face.

But she turned it away—would let him see nothing but the big crown of her brown bonnet.

"I wish I was at home," murmured she, miserably; "the idea of my laughing at him like that!"

"But," argued Mr. Valoynes, "he is laughable—laughable *à faire mourir!*" and therewith laughed—low and scornfully.

Between private prejudice and public principle when shall the war be ended?—truly no pact 'twixt lamb and lion were more miraculous.

CHAPTER III.

BUT EVIL SAITH TO GOOD, "MY BROTHER."

GREAT, however, as might be the occasion generously provided by Mr. Latchet for the display of hilarity on the part of his fellow-creatures, personally he experienced some little difficulty in appreciating the exact worth of his munificence. To the general public he might seem one so far removed by niggard nature, and the whispered but irrevocable decrees of an artificial society from the interests of youth, the influence of passion, the seductions of pleasure, that to connect him even mentally with either the one or the other must as assuredly give rise to humorous imaginations, produce laughter, as must twenty-three parts of oxygen mixed together and not chemically combined with

seventy-seven parts of nitrogen produce air. But the general public is not remarkable for its clearness of judgment when viewed from that elevated coign of vantage known as one's Self—particularly when that Self presents facilities for surveying on an extended scale, as rare as they are undeniable. The general public was welcome to its convictions, thought Acts, as he toiled up that stony lane, his hands clasped behind him, a curious smile on his large mouth. He could afford to be tolerant. Nevertheless, that Tryphena should be allowed by her natural protectors to go for long walks, to run races with a man who three months ago was a total stranger—one not known to exist—could scarcely be held indicative of discretion or due regard for the sentiments of those who, by right of prior acquaintance and constant attachment, possessed claims to consideration.

Moreover it did not please Mr. Latchet to find that at the Grange, as elsewhere, the popular opinion concerning himself and his proceedings had gotten hold.

"What is there about me," mused he, gloomily, "that I should be cut off from all

pleasantness; that while Mr. Robert Valoynes may make a fool of himself without derogating from his native greatness, I am to be condemned for ever to grim solitary wisdom?" and as he mused blithe laughter floated upwards on the keen strong air. Tryphena had just taken her first slide that winter on the pond at the bottom of the lane—the tomboy! 'Twas no wonder that the man felt bitter.

Rapid motion is, however, an effectual cure for the vapours. Gradually his expression changed from that of mere dissatisfaction to resolve. Closely he wrapped his long cloak about him, holding it tight as he might hold some live creature wild for liberty. Bravely he battled on in the teeth of the north-east wind—a wind to Robert pleasant as a kiss, to him cruel as a knife, for he had his face to it; so was it always.

The down crossed and the lane attained, the sun already glowed spherical and fiery in the vague, cloudless heaven as he started to run down the hill—for some cause, or perhaps only because he felt cold, he seemed in a great hurry—painless respiration became possible, a smile again curved his lips.

"We shall see," said he to himself, not quite unexultingly—"we shall see;" and hastened on faster than before.

As I have told you already, The Tumps—by which unbeautiful and apparently meaningless appellation folks in Shobdon understood the field devoted by Mr. Fowke to chapel-building in the future and desolation in the present—lay a few hundred yards beyond the first or last house in the village, according to the direction in which you were proceeding. It was not exactly an inviting spot wherein to linger on a nipping December afternoon—not a spot specially adapted to conversation, or provocative of brilliance, being indeed possessed of little natural beauty, and wholly destitute of interest, unless you felt curiosity concerning the structural instincts of moles, and the possibilities of growth open to thistles and the coarser kind of grass. Nevertheless, to this barren and wind-scourged refuge of nothingness Mr. Latchet bent his steps; Tryphena had mentioned that her father was at work there.

As he passed the Shop—I feel constrained

to make use of a capital letter, being at a loss how otherwise to convey my sense of the dignity of that most important establishment—Martha Tapp made her appearance, her arms full of small sugar-loaf-shaped blue and white parcels.

"Good-afternoon, Martha," smiled he; "I hope I see you well?"

"Yes, sir," she answered—"I'm well enough. Nothing don't seem to disagree with me, 'cept it is politics."

Whereat Acts laughed, and remarked that they "were apt to try the strongest constitutions."

But an observant person noting the form of Martha's visage, as she watched the minister out of sight, might well have felt inclined to challenge the accuracy of her self-knowledge. That politics disagreed with her might be, nay, was, beyond dispute; that Whig and Tory accurately set forth her gravest, her sole causes for disquietude, must remain matter for doubt. The most candid of us, being human, have our moments of backsliding.

Mr. Latchet, however, having other things

to think of than the emotions of a milkmaid—born of the people as this man was, and democratic as was his creed and leanings (for in the "equal in Christ" theory of John Wesley is concealed as determined a socialism as ever invited reprobation in the writings of Fourier or St. Simon), no courtier of Whitehall, no dandler of royal babies and washer of royalties' dirty linen, could be more self-engrossed, more persuaded of the radical difference between mind and mind than he—having, then, other things to think of than the emotions of a milkmaid, this labourer in the vineyard walked on quick and eager—walked on till he reached The Tumps, and turned in at the gate, which swung unlatched, contrary to custom.

The world was already growing gray—the mist, inseparable from twilight at this season of the year, already flung weird draperies on naked trunk and bough; human breath, the breath of cattle spread white, like steam, upon the frosty air; one could not clearly see objects distant a hundred yards.

Acts stood still and debated within himself as to the best course to pursue. The Tumps

was a large field, and on one side lurked a pit—thus much he knew from having heard Aunt Rachel remark that no more sheep must be pastured there, owing to a valuable ewe having fallen a victim to this treacherous cavity; also the molehills being abundant and of a superior order of architecture, progression was likely to be attended with difficulty. Acts stood still. Suddenly, however, sounds as of wheels and labouring hoofs struck upon his ear, likewise of voices. He made a few steps forward. Yes, there was a cart—a cart and horse—and at the head of the horse seemingly walked a man.

"Hi!" called Acts, finding that his presence remained unnoticed—"is that Mr. Fowke?"

"Nay," rejoined John Tapp, bidding his convoy in the same breath to "Geewoat"—an injunction which it is to be hoped was more intelligible to that worthy beast than to me—"the maister's in the ditch along o' Tom; what might you be a-wantin'?"

"I wish to speak with him," responded the minister.

"Woy, it do be Mr. Latchet!" exclaimed John, in a tone of surprise. "Good-evenin',

sir. I'd no idea 'twas you; my eyes ain't so young as they weer. Woat, lass!" and a resounding crack of the long carter's whip.

"Fayther!" called Tom Tapp, from the other end of the field, "bide a bit. I be just finished."

"All right!" bawled John. "Theer, sir, the maister's done now. You'd better step across to un."

"Very well," said Acts; "but which way does that pit lie? I've not been here before."

"The pit," said John, turning himself about, and scratching his head with the butt handle of his whip, "do lie over theer; but 'tain't nothin' for you to be afeard on, it's got a bottom."

To this remark Acts vouchsafed no reply, walking on in the direction of Tom Tapp, as indicated by his voice, as rapidly as the irregular ground and insufficient light would let him. John's profanities were matters of too frequent recurrence to afford occasion for the utterance of rebuke either apposite or lasting. Other remonstrances than human must be brought to bear on him before a change could be expected; even a "pillar of fire" and Second

Paul might acknowledge thus much without loss of self-esteem.

Tom said good-night to, and the hedge nearly reached, Mr. Fowke, tall, straight, and lean, loomed through the mist, rising up out of the ditch, as Sinbad's genii from his bottle, with quite startling suddenness.

"How do you do?" said Acts, stumbling forwards; "I thought I should find you here;" and he stretched out his hand.

"What made you think that?" inquired Jacob, stooping down to brush the soil off his gaiters.

"I met Miss Tryphena in Charwood Lane, and she mentioned that you were engaged in a crusade against the molehills—in contemplation, I suppose, of foundation digging?"

Jacob held his peace. Mr. Latchet surveyed the heavens.

"Another frost," observed he, presently. "The winter promises to be uncommonly severe."

"Ay," said Jacob, moving on, "them who up till now have spent instead of saving 'll laugh on the wrong side of their mouths before long, I expect."

Acts smiled.

"Yes," said he, "cakes and ale at Whitsuntide usually mean a cold hearth and empty cupboard at Christmas; but adversity seems quite wasted on some people."

"As well waste one way as another," was the grim answer.

The minister laughed, and again they relapsed into silence.

"By-the-way," remarked he at length, in the tone of one just struck by a pleasant thought, "how well Mr. Valoynes is looking! His tour must have done him good."

"Why shouldn't it?" rejoined Jacob.

"Why, indeed; only I was quite surprised by the change. I should think he must ride quite a stone heavier than when he left."

"Very likely," said Mr. Fowke; "I haven't weighed him."

Another pause. Half the distance 'twixt gate and ditch was now accomplished—a few more minutes, and they would issue forth upon the road, liable to be joined by passers-by, open to interruptions of endless variety. Acts slackened his pace.

"I am afraid," commenced he, with a depre-

catory cough, "that what I am about to say may strike you in the light of an unwarrantable liberty, but when supplemented by explanation"——

Jacob gazed steadily upon the ground. From the expression of his face you could not have told whether he was listening or not.

Acts coughed again. Stolid indifference as effectually checks enthusiasm as an earthwork incandescent bombs.

"I think," pursued he, at length, however, in a tone so grave as to be all but solemn, "that it is scarcely wise to let Miss Tryphena see so much of a certain friend of ours. Of course her purity is unimpeachable; but she is very young and very beautiful—and, in short, I have said all this to Miss Fowke before."

"You have?" observed Jacob; "and what answer did you get?"

"Well, she seemed a little less alive to the necessity for caution than I could have wished; but ladies are seldom proof against the fascinations of a handsome face."

Jacob smiled.

"So, being after my encounter of this after-

noon more persuaded than ever that it was my duty to confer with you——"

Mr. Fowke gave vent to a low laugh—a laugh as little mirthful as it was well possible for a laugh to be.

"What were they doing, then?" he demanded. "Had he got her round the waist? —was he kissing her?"

Dead silence.

"What were they doing?" demanded Jacob again.

"I am surprised," observed Acts, with excessive coldness, "that you should associate your daughter's name with such repulsive suggestions."

"Repulsive?" echoed Jacob; "I don't see it—more would you, if you'd been the man. Don't you fancy you can blind me!"

"I have no wish to blind you," was the prompt retort; "on the contrary, my desire is to open your eyes before it is too late."

"Too late for what?" inquired Mr. Fowke, coolly.

"To stop a villain's villany!" with warmth.

"Pooh!" said Jacob, "Mr. Valoynes is no villain. I know what I'm about."

"But," argued Acts, "I don't understand what you are about; for if, which is scarcely to be expected, he made an offer to Tryphena, you would surely not allow her to accept him —an atheist, a man whose ideas of marriage are no better than a Turk's."

"Time enough to think of all that."

Acts' face grew dark.

"You see," pursued Jacob, slowly, "opinions ain't certainties; wealth is. There was a time when I thought different—when I fancied, so long as a man or a woman was honest and God-fearing and useful, poverty and obscurity were rather blessings than otherwise, removing temptation—but now I know better; and if the girl fancies a rich husband, and can get one, why, all I say is—let her."

Mr. Latchet smiled, not without contempt.

"You make no secret of your worldliness, at all events," observed he, dryly.

"Why should I?" returned Jacob, boldly; "'twould be certain to crop out sooner or later. Besides, I don't find that I'm a pin worse than others—others who stand well with the Lord, and consider themselves His

chosen servants. There's yourself, now. You'd like to marry my girl. Why? You say, 'Because she's comely and healthy, and been well brought up, and I love her!' That's what you say; but I say, 'Mr. Latchet's a clever man, and knows which side his bread's buttered, and he thinks Phenie when I'm dead 'll come in for a tidy bit o' money; besides 'twould be a creditable connection, we Fowkes being known hereabouts. I won't say he don't fancy her for other reasons. That's likely enough. Ministers as well as other men like handsome wives better than plain ones; but the money's at the bottom of it. It's the money,'" with malicious emphasis and a slow evil smile, "'that he's after.' See?"

"No," said Acts, promptly, "I don't. I see nothing of the sort."

"To be sure not," smiled Jacob. "'Tisn't to be expected that one who takes such a deal of interest in his neighbours should know much about himself."

The minister shook his head.

"You quite misunderstand me," he sighed. "That I do admire and esteem Tryphena

more than any other young lady I will not attempt to deny. Nay, that admiration and esteem are in themselves a most pleasing proof to me of my small fitness to become her husband; but of her fortune I think nothing. If she were a penniless orphan I should be just as anxious to obtain her hand. It is herself I want; her money may be sunk at the bottom of the sea for all I care."

And he spake truly.

Nevertheless Jacob's brow cleared not; indeed he looked gloomier than before, for in that final figure of speech his suspicious mind apprehended covert reference to mercantile enterprise, and a certain barque now skimming tropic seas.

"Humph!" grunted he, and they walked on; the night air forbade loitering.

At the gate Acts halted.

"Well," observed Jacob, regarding him with sullen fixedness—"ain't you coming up to the house?"

"No," he answered, "I think not. I do not feel quite equal to society to-night."

Mr. Fowke looked away into the twilight.

"As you like," said he—"good victuals

seldom go long a-begging;" and therewith moved off towards the village.

For a moment or two Acts remained motionless, sense merged in thought—thought tumultuous, ungovernable; thought whence could be derived no solace, no support, which bewildered, rather than directed; such thought as vibrates in the atmosphere of lunatic asylums, and lends malarious radiance to the weak smile of idiocy. Then, sighing again, he turned himself about and faced the gloom —gloom maybe pierced by stars, made luminous of moonbeams, everywhere, save on the Coatham road, but there, for him, lone toiler in dim weary ways—of quite Egyptian density, so that a man walked blind, Pain treading on his heels, perplexed, afraid. Poor Acts!

CHAPTER IV.

OH, SOLE, SWEET THING!

HO that has wandered of a winter's day 'midst woods, or down some fair forest glade, fair with soft brown of fallen leaves, and gray of clouds, and sober green of frost-touched grass, but, gazing up at the stripped oaks and beeches scattered round about, has marvelled at the contortions of their gnarled mighty limbs, has sought to divine the power which could thus peremptorily work out its will, in spite of matter, man—nay, even laws of growth. Nor is this wonder likely to decrease, when by the exercise of reason we solve the mystery; for that Eolus, most shadowy of kings, should hold those giants as his slaves, from whose abase-

ment tyrants have shrunk abashed, is of a surety sufficiently amazing.

But stupendous as on reflection may appear the force of these aërial currents through which we, as a rule, sail so pleasantly in this good ship of ours—ship, built how, when launched, bound for what port, no man can say, not even Captain Heat, nor Lieutenant Light, nor Purser Gold, nor yet the man at the wheel, whose name varies according to the soul he speaks with, being for one Death, for another Life, to you Fortune, to me Ruin —stupendous as may seem the power of wind—considered in relation to bent boughs, compared with that of love newly awakened in the mind of a maiden—well, that I should venture on such a comparison, speaks surely for itself.

From the readiness with which Tryphena acceded, in her own mind, to Robert's proposal that she should walk with him to Charwood, and the freedom wherewith she discoursed concerning natural objects, the days of Monmouth, and other simple and harmless subjects, as they made their way up the lane

and over the down to that secluded and much-rained-on hamlet; likewise the enjoyment she appeared to derive from the running of races, and sliding on ponds—enjoyment so hearty as to completely dissipate regret at the exhibition of levity or an old friend's mortification—a thoughtful person might be led to infer that a change, a marked change, to be more accurate, had occurred in her mode of thought of late; that life, the future, Mr. Latchet, even Mr. Valoynes, scarce looked the same as when the Michaelmas goose still screeched woe to worms. And that thoughtful person would be right.

The girl's mode of thought had changed. Life, the future, Mr. Latchet, even Mr. Valoynes, did not look quite the same to her as they had six weeks ago. Why, I cannot tell you. Nor could she. With young delicate souls transition is very gradual; it is also feelingless, being a concomitant of life, much as is the upward growth of some pale tiny plant but yesterday a seed. Tryphena did not know that she had altered, that besides altering she had shifted her position, so to speak, her face being now

turned full towards the sun, her eyes made glad with pleasantness, on her lips a smile. So have I seen the face of one, who stood and gazed on Summer fallen asleep in a green valley, her lap full of flowers, her head pillowed on ripe corn; but she had altered—the time of her blossoming drew nigh.

Is not the red splendour of first love glorious as sunrise in a land white with olives, watched by heights hoar with eternal snows? Shall sullen rocks, lashed by brown passionate floods, flecked with the wreckage of drowned homes, o'erhung by stubborn firs, or bald gray crags, pitiless, barren as the grave, giving shelter but to eagles who thither bear 'twixt bloody claws lambs plucked whilst feeding from their mothers' sides, be reckoned equal to one widow's tears?—the wrought loveliness of pallid capital and burnished bronze outshine the lustre of a noble deed—the simple beauty of a kindly act, done for love's sake, with no thought of reward? I venture to think not; and, thinking thus, find in the consideration of Tryphena's outlook at this time—an outlook so varied, so unaccustomed, the old

being new, the new old, that my weak pen in attempting its portrayal trembles—satisfaction as thorough and material for reflection as abundant as could I, were she the most magnificently wicked of women, and Shobdon the city set midst lilies in her prime.

To eyes dulled with constant seeing, to her aunt, her father, John Tapp, the girl seemed much as usual; perhaps a little brisker in her movements, a little more inclined to laughter and the talking of nonsense to Beauty, the cocks and hens, and Shrimp, a diminutive bull-calf of true Devonian extraction, but the least possible amount of personal graces, which had on that account been relegated to her care from the hour of his birth; but Christmas was apt to make young folks feel cheerful—there was nothing wonderful in that.

Opinion, however, even in this limited area, displayed diversity of texture. Martha saw, or imagined she saw—which answered the same purpose—farther than most people, and that which she saw most plainly was, so she averred, "meaning."

"Ah," said she to John, an evening or two

after her encounter with Mr. Latchet, "we shall 'ave fine doin's soon. I wonder if maister'll 'ave the 'eart to kill one of them fat beasts of 'is, and let some o' we poor strugglers know the taste of beef for once? 'Twould be worth a many prayers to more than me, I fancy."

"What be ee talkin' about?" inquired John, pausing, saw in hand—he was engaged in the conversion of a splintered rail into fire-wood—to stare up at her from beneath a mat of rust-coloured hair, in vague astonishment.

"Miss Phenie, to be sure," was the prompt answer, given while snuffing the rushlight; "Lord, what stupes men do be!"

"Well, but what's Miss Phenie got to do with maister's fat beasts?" pursued John stolidly, handling a plump log.

"Wheer be your eyes?" responded Martha.

John resumed his saw.

"Wheer they should be," he answered, going to work again, "so far as I know."

"Ah," said Miss Tapp, with caustic emphasis, "so far as you know; but theer, 'twouldn't do for all of us to be of one pattern. Let be a bit. Gals don't giggle,

and colour up, and dance when they ought to walk, like that for nothin'; not quiet gals, that is—romps is different."

"Ay," said John, who generally agreed with his daughter when he had the chance; "not that I know much about either sort: one young 'ooman's pretty much like another in my 'pinion, 'lowin' for featurs."

Martha gazed reflectively at the leg of a stocking she was knitting, laid it down on the table, spread it out, and shook her head at it. Mr. Valoynes was a fine man; but Westmoreland might be Ameriky, so far as she was concerned, and there was but one Miss Phenie. Bless her!

Meanwhile the moment of Mr. Valoynes' departure drew nearer hour by hour. By two consecutive posts had he received advices from Kirton. The one from Thwaites, the other from Mrs. Agar, his housekeeper, imploring his return—Christmas being declared to be no Christmas without him, the New Year not worth welcoming beneath a roof left masterless, by friends deserted for strangers.

"Poor Matthew," smiled Robert, as he re-

folded the old man's pale scrawl, "I suppose he is right. I suppose one ought to be at home at this season, if only to see that the ale is sound, and the whole ox not over-roasted. What a pity it is that duty and inclination so seldom pull together!"

"Yes," said Tryphena; "but if I was rich and could make people happy simply by being with them, I do not think I should ever find occasion to make that remark; I should be so proud of being thought so much of."

"But if to be thought so much of you had to quit a place where you had been very happy—a place you might never see again—what then?"

She turned away her head.

"I do not know," said she in a low, grave voice—her eyes out among the gooseberry bushes—"that would be painful."

"Yes," rejoined Robert, and paused,—to add after a brief space more cheerfully, "But I must answer this at once. I shall start next Monday."

That day was Wednesday. Four morns, five eves, and he would have passed away out of her sight, be unto her as one dead; and

he did like her just a little, as he liked Silvertail, his deerhound, even his best fishing-rod.

A sigh escaped her lips, a faint melancholy smile stole over her sweet face. It was better that he should go—much better—indeed it would be quite wrong of him to stay. A man of influence like him, and dispenser of bounties. Still——

Tryphena sighed again. It was such unseasonable weather.

Before assertion, persuasion is, I find, prone to bow the head. Robert's avowal of his intentions, an avowal made at dinner with some appearance of hilarity, roused no opposition. Aunt Rachel said she was sorry that they were to lose him so soon. Jacob merely nodded. Never was the path of duty freer from obstruction.

The day, as I have said, was called Wednesday; it was also gray, and quite singularly mild for the time of year, the frost of a week ago having given way to rain, succeeded by warm mists, through which the globular sun loomed sullenly, luring violets to rash casting of green snoods, yet not a day on which

the mind bent outwards, the lanes being muddy, and the air unrefreshing. Tryphena, however, being country bred, and accustomed to pay heed to rule rather than incidental circumstances, having made an end of eating, observed that now she must set off to the village, if her round of visits—visits supplementary to those paid by the minister, and generally appreciated—was to be completed before dark, and therewith took her sun-bonnet from its accustomed peg.

Robert watched her small preparations—the tying on of her cloak, the pinning up of her skirt, the packing of her basket with tracts, divers cornucopiæ of rice, sugar, snuff, and tea, and last, but not least, a well-worn pocket Bible—in silence. You might have thought that he would have said, "Let me come with you," but he said nothing. He only sat and looked. When she was quite ready and about to go, he got up and walked slowly to the door.

"I think it will be fine," observed he, lifting the latch, and strolled on to the gate—the garden gate, newly painted a dark green.

"Oh, yes," said she, following close upon his heels; "it is sure to be that; it never rains on this kind of day before sunset."

"How long shall you be?" he asked, turning to gaze on her, so slight and meek a "her" in her dark raiment and great purple hood.

"About an hour and a half," she answered, growing a little pink; "I have not many places to go to."

"Then I will meet you," he rejoined, "and we will walk back together—that is, if you have no objection."

This quite as an afterthought, though.

"Oh, no," smiled she; "I shall be glad of company; but where will you meet me? We ought to settle that."

"Yes," he said, and seemed to think. "Shall it be the tree on the green?"

"Very well," she answered.

"But," he pursued, "whoever gets there first must wait."

"Very well," answered she again, and laughed. "It is so certain to be me," she added.

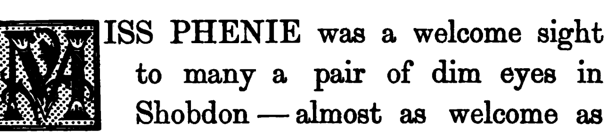
But he shook his head.

"Mignonne," said he, and laid his hand on hers, the one holding the basket.

It was but a trifling action, thoughtless, too, in all likelihood, as the pat one bestows on a favourite dog; nevertheless it set her heart thumping—made her throat quiver. A vague trouble on her face, she hurried off up the lane. If only he would keep from being kind to her! What bitterness so deep as getting lean friendliness for love!

CHAPTER V.

SWAYED FLOWER-FASHION.



MISS PHENIE was a welcome sight to many a pair of dim eyes in Shobdon — almost as welcome as those horned packets of dry goods which weekly found their way to the cupboards of certain aged and poverty-pinched inmates of the fold, mentioned by the minister as fit objects for charity, from the Grange store-room. The tones of her clear young voice when reading how Jesus fed the hungry, or blessed the little children; or more touching still, how He brake bread and gave to the twelve on the eve of His betrayal, were, said

old Mrs. Cornelius—who was blind and lost her only son last summer in a fever, brought on by drinking—"sweet as bells, so that it did a body good to listen to 'em without thinkin' o' any words." The touch of her hand on palsied arms comforted and soothed like sleep.

"When I do wake of a morning, missie," said Betty Gear, not so very long ago, as she set a chair for her young visitor, "and think Miss Phenie 'll be round to-day, my 'eart feels that light that it might be my 'ead, and it's not because of the tea entirely." Betty was a God-fearing woman, and loved truth. Yes; Tryphena got affection and pleasant memories not a few by her grave listenings and tender pity for small miseries, and the dull aches of work-worn bones. Even "the maister" lost something of his hardness, took goodlier shape in the popular mind viewed through the veil of her compassion; for as Betty one day remarked, "'Twarn't every man as 'ad such a darter, and if bad children brought shame, good should bring honour."

But to-day, though sweet voiced and smiling

as usual, willing to be interested, too, in tidings of persons whom she had never seen, the delinquencies of "them urchins," and the progress of internal disorders of a more or less distressing and delicate nature, it was plain when she reached the last house on her list, a lopsided cottage owned by her father, and sadly out of repair, as indeed were most of the tenements in his possession, moreover, inhabited by a wonderful little old lady, who had been bed-ridden for seven and twenty years, and seemed likely, from the excellence of her appetite and the lively expression of her countenance, to be bed-ridden for seven and twenty more, that her patience was well-nigh exhausted.

"You're tired, my dear!" said the wonderful little old lady, whose surname was Fox, and Christian name Christina, or, as she termed it, "Curstina," and who was a spinster, having in her youth contracted an engagement with one James Cox, which engagement had come to nothing, owing to the said James having fallen over Liss cliff one dark night and broken his neck—"you're tired, or maybe you've got some one waitin' for you. What, blushin'?

Then it is true. Dear, dear, dear! Well, I'm sure I wishes ye j'y; but don't you read any more. It's cold work standin' about of a winter's evenin'. That was one thing my poor James would never do—'Curstina,' he used to say—"

Tryphena rose to her feet.

"You ain't offended?" said Miss Fox, sobering suddenly.

"No," replied the girl, resignedly, "it is but one more pea in my shoes!"

"S-s!" retorted the little lady; "you take things too serious — too serious by 'alf. What's youth meant for but enjoyment? Lor! when I was a gal, there was n't a bit o' fun goin' but I was in it. That was 'ow I come to meet Jim. It was winter, a little later than this, and—"

"Yes," interposed Tryphena, picking up her basket, "I know; you've told me before."

"Ah!" chuckled Miss Fox, playfully shaking a small, shrivelled forefinger; "I see it plain enough. Don't you try to impose on an old 'and like me." But she spoke to herself—her victim had disappeared.

"To be sixty and a cripple, and have but

four shillings a week between one and the workhouse, and talk like that," thought she, indignantly, as she flitted past house and hovel. "I shall not go near the green;" and therewith she turned down a narrow lane fringed with tall hedges on either side—a lane given up to ghosts, footpads, evil report generally—a lane she seldom traversed of her own free will even in broad daylight; but she was so determined to starve rumour. It had hurt her not a little to endure Martha's strictures; but to believe herself a subject for free discussion, an excuse for gossip, and origin of scandal—oh, it was terrible! And six months ago—six little months—she had lived so differently, as might a star set in its apportioned heaven, free from all lessening influence, to shine the sole end of being.

Suddenly the sound as of one running smote hard upon her ears. Vexation changed to terror. She paused to listen. Was it a beast or a man who thus pursued after her?

"Hulloa!" exclaimed some one, bursting through the gloom—some one who, as he came nearer, proved to be Mr. Valoynes, "a fine scamper you've given me! Why didn't you

come to the tree? I've been there for the last twenty minutes."

She remained silent.

"Perverse monkey!" he went on, taking her by the shoulder, "I should have missed you altogether if Dicky Ludlow hadn't espied me mooning about, and told me which way you'd gone."

"Dicky should mind his own business," she responded, shaking herself free of him with a petulant jerk. "One would think I was some wild animal—a wolf, or a bear, or a badger"—most bitterly—"some creature given up to be hunted!"

"One would, indeed," smiled Robert, gravely; "that is, if one did not know you to be something much worse—namely, a very cross young woman."

She turned her face away, her eyes were full of tears, laughter trembled on her lips. If only he would go on, and leave her to herself.

But this was precisely the one thing he did not mean to do.

"What is the matter?" inquired he, at length, finding she did not speak. "Have I frightened you?"

"No," she answered, wishing her eyelashes were possessed of absorbent qualities.

"Then," said he, "why don't you look round? You can see that hedge any day."

Still she stood motionless.

"Tryphena," remarked he, soberly, laying his hand upon her arm and bending forward, "this is not kind. I have done nothing to deserve this."

"I do not know," she answered.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

But she held her peace.

"Well," said he at length, dejectedly, letting go of her, "if you will not speak, you will not—I cannot force you; but it is very wretched, and I have been so happy of late"—with increased melancholy—"thinking of all the good days in store for us. Yes, us. One is such a fool."

Weakly she made a few steps forward. She felt as if walking up a wall.

"And," pursued he, more loudly, exchanging sadness for the rash jollity of desperation, "this afternoon my folly was to have culminated. As I waited for you just now but one thought filled my mind—namely, how

shall I tell her that I love her? How ask her to be my wife—to come to me and let me cherish and protect and worship her to my life's end? And then—so mad was I and utterly deceived—I fancied that perhaps I need not speak at all, that I would just take you in my arms and draw you to me, and——"

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed the girl, piteously.

"What?" said he, "you care—my pain is something to you!" and seemed about to halt.

But she sped on, as fast as her trembling legs would carry her. If it were but June!

"Child!" said he, gravely, again clasping her soft arm, "this is pure foolishness. You have heard what I have to say. Give me my answer. Why should you wish to run away from me? I am no boy to kick at fate."

Still she replied not; in good sooth she lacked choice of words, one only being present to her mind. But she could not stay there all night.

"Please don't be angry with me," commenced she, hurriedly; "I am quite conscious of the—the honour you have done me; but"

—her voice quivering into a sob—"I scarcely know what I am saying."

"Well?" observed Robert, finding that she showed scant inclination to proceed.

Thus stimulated, she again mustered breath and fortitude.

"It is impossible," she continued; "I said as much the other morning. I have told myself so—ever since—since you began to be so—so good to me. Oh, why ever did you come back again?" and hiding her face in her hands, she abandoned all attempt at self-control, and wept unrestrainedly.

"I came back," said Robert, quickly, "because I loved you—because I could not live well away from you! But why do you cry so? There is no need for you to cry."

She sighed deep and shudderingly.

"Tryphena," smiled he, taking her hands in his—cold little hands, and wet with tears—"I know that you always speak the truth; that I can depend upon your honesty. Tell me one thing: am I in the least dear to you, my darling?"

The man's soul was moved within him. He could no more help saying those two words—

most beautiful of words when rightly spoken —than the earth can help rolling round the sun.

A strange peace filled the girl's pale face.

"Yes," replied she, looking up at him, in simplest confidence; "you are dear to me. I see no fault in you."

"Then," he exclaimed, "I care for nothing! Come joy, come woe, my happiness is safe;" and drew her close to him—dealt with her loverwise. I have no wit to shape

"A scanted tithe of this great joy they had."

"But," said she, when his lip hunger was in part appeased—she was so fond of saying "but"—"this cannot last!"

"Why?" he questioned.

"For one thing it is too pleasant," with a low laugh; "for another, I'm about as fit to be your wife as—as Aunt Rachel!"

"Of that I am surely the best judge. No, you will not be set at liberty yet. There is no hurry."

"But just think what people would say if any one came by; besides, it is quite tea-time, and aunt will be so cross with me."

"Your aunt will not be cross when I tell her the reason."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tryphena, burying her red face in his greatcoat, "oh! whatever should I do then?"

"Do!" he echoed, "why kiss everybody all round, including Beauty and Shrimp, and me three times."

"No," laughed she; "I would kiss Beauty three times, and you not at all; because Beauty is old, and you are young, and have lots of kissing opportunities. Oh, dear!"

"Wherefore 'oh, dear?'"

"I love you so. Is it wrong to say that? I have longed to say it for days and days, and I have said it to myself," with another of those tender little laughs, nestling close to him. "How is it that you are so different to other men?"

He smiled.

"I am not different," he made answer, "except to you."

For a while they stood silent. Then Tryphena, raising her head and looking up at him, out of eyes dark with vague awe—she knew so little of this fresh self of hers—said:

"Don't tell them anything to-night."

"Why?"

"I should like to be perfectly content just once before—I die."

"Child!" said he; and pressed his lips to hers; he got great joy by her simplicity. "Why didn't you come to the tree?" questioned he presently, holding her away from him as if to match speech with look.

She waxed a little grave; then she replied, stroking the brown fur on his coat:

"I was vexed by something I heard; it seems so dreadful to be talked about, and I don't know," as if troubled, "I have always meant to do so differently, not to live like other people, caring for nothing but food and clothes, and how much money one can make. That is why I cannot be quite happy even now. Why, I feel as if I was beneath my best, and yet I cannot help myself. But of course you cannot understand all that."

"But of course I can," retorted Robert, promptly; "I am not quite a simpleton. Still, I do not think that in marrying me you will exactly narrow your power of doing good. There are plenty of old women about Kirton,

and ignorant little children, and even young men and maidens, to whom a word in season might not come amiss. Westmoreland is something less than Paradise."

"But," she rejoined, "I had made up my mind to be a missionary."

"Eh?" he ejaculated, liberating her in his amazement.

"I will tell you as we go along," she answered, straightening her rumpled cloak, and forthwith commenced that ample narrative —what history so precious as one's own?

"Well," observed Mr. Valoynes, as she made an end of speaking, and they turned into the Grange road, "henceforth Haroun al Raschid may hide his diminished head. And have you heard no more of this miraculous barque?"

"Dear, no!" said Tryphena; "how should we?—we know no one in Bridport; and as for asking father——"

And a significant pause.

"And you think that this is the reason of his coolness towards Mr. Latchet?"

"I can think of nothing else. But," she pursued, eagerly, "you will not let them know

that I have told you—you will let things be for this one evening?"

"Why do you ask?" smiled he. "Do you not know that henceforth your pleasure will be the chief business of my life?"

"Nay," replied the girl, quickly; "I should be very sorry to think that. A man's wife is surely meant to be his helpmeet rather than his plaything—to encourage him to do better, instead of inviting him to do worse."

And Robert pressed her hand.

Aunt Rachel and Mr. Fowke were both seated at the tea-table when these lovers re-entered the Grange kitchen; indeed, the tea-pot had received its second watering, and the plum cake suffered losses. But no remark was made, beyond a casual "first come, first served" from Jacob, accompanied by a nod at an empty jam dish. It was an understood thing by this time that Mr. Valoynes did as he pleased.

In solid sequence the quiet hours stole by, enriched with divers readings from the "Lyme Mercury," and a "Western Chronicle" some three weeks old, which had been recently lent to Aunt Rachel by Mrs. Kipps, whose eldest son

was a bookbinder at Yeovil, and of literary leanings. Tryphena darned and dreamed; Beauty dreamed and snored; the old clock creaked and groaned; Robert, nursing his knee, gazed at the flickering fire; the shadows ran races on the walls.

At length time signalled prayer. The work-baskets were put away, Beauty was turned out into the garden; the great black Bible was taken from the cupboard. Jacob coughed solemnly.

"You'd better read to-night, Phenie," observed he, pushing it across the table. "I've tired my eyes with them newspapers."

"Very well, father," she answered, and therewith sat her down.

Robert, contrary to his custom, kept his seat—a proceeding which caused Aunt Rachel not only to eye him narrowly, but with uneasiness, and subsequent loss of sleep—being opposed to suddenness of any kind.

The chapter chosen by Tryphena for that evening's lecture was the fifteenth of John, and rarely sweet sounded the fair words told out in her soft clear treble, like water purling over stones under green wind-kissed boughs;

sweet, too, the simple prayer, the short familiar hymn.

"If you were parson," smiled Robert, as she lit her candle, "I should go to church."

But she only shook her head.

"Good-night," she said, and offered him her hand.

"Good-night," he answered, and raised it to his lips.

Scared, she glanced towards her father.

His eyes were fixed on them.

"It is all wrong," whispered she to herself, as she loosed string and button, bared her white beauty to the chill touch of the gelid air; "as wrong as wrong can be, and sure to bring grief. When did wrong otherwise? But I do love him—I do love him—my dearest!" And her eyes gleamed with quick rapturous tears.

A perilous blossoming.

CHAPTER VI.

STILL SWEET AND KEEN.

HE following day dawned gray and damp, but above the horizon spread a broad belt of gold, whence Tryphena, as she gazed, drew pleasant auguries, being weatherwise.

Sleep, to fact, is as atmosphere to a landscape—it best enables one to determine distances and judge proportions.

Stirred to the deepest depths of her nature by the knowledge that Robert loved her, this country maiden had as yet been unable to realize the exact value of that knowledge. That she should love him—the brightest, most beautiful of beings—had by this time become not only inevitable, but even praiseworthy, so subtle a casuist is nature; but

the direct good to her as one woman among many, likely to result from his sensibility to her littleness, shall we say, still remained doubtful. Now, however, invigorated by rest and the strong air of early morning, she saw what was more clearly, saw—broom in hand, eyes bent on the white pebbles fretting the garden path—how vast the treasure she had won, how essential its attainment if she would not walk pinched and lone all the days of a joy-stripped life.

There was no reason, as he had said, why she should not do good at Kirton—good was no more local than sexual—and money gave one power to act, to crush vile accident as could naught else, not even a clean heart. Besides, if Robert were inclined to exalt unduly the fleshly understanding, he was also, without knowing it, as fervent a follower after Gospel teaching—teaching not opposed to charity, humility, ardour in the cause of right—as the minister himself. For worldly pomp he seemed to care nothing; neither did he affect bodily luxury beyond cold water, fresh air, and a plenitude of clean linen. If only he would give up French literature, and not speak

against the king, no union could more strenuously invite blessing.

And with God all things were possible.

Sometimes, when startled by the revelation of extreme depravity on the part of one noted for excellence and strong religious convictions, we are apt to exclaim, "But how could he ever have come to such a pass? How was he able to thus flagrantly defy his former self?" Now such exclamation testifies alike to our lack of penetration and ignorance of psychological phenomena. The religious man, more than any other, is open to purely mental temptation. From set habits of withdrawal from passing interests, constant culture of the "I," conscience becomes rather a friend than a monitor—loses the instinct of reproof. Wrong to such a one is rather a moral exercise than an irredeemable evil; sin an occasion for wholesome contrition, rather than a provocative of hearty abhorrence.

I do not say that Tryphena erred in loving Robert Valoynes; neither would I be thought to insinuate that his position or wealth for one instant influenced her choice. She was as careless of great estate as a wild flower. All I

desire to maintain is that such love is compatible with candour and continued desire to do right; for subtle, as I have remarked, is the casuistry of nature.

Aunt Rachel having lain awake "half the night, owing to the rats and that third cup of tea, which why she took goodness alone knew," appeared this morning—as was her wont on the like inauspicious occasions—some twenty minutes earlier than usual, in her least becoming cap, and something less than the best of tempers.

But Tryphena had a smile for every caustic word, a pleasant answer for each derisive question. So had she when the music of Afric's fountains filled her enraptured ears, when the "poor black" reigned lord of dreams and thoughts.

"You grin," observed Miss Fowke—on whom the effect of amiability was uncertain, as is that of opiates on particular constitutions—"like a Cheshire cat. What have you been up to?—robbing the larder?"

"No," replied the girl; "I have not been near the larder. I smiled because I felt happy, that was all."

"Pooh!" scoffed Aunt Rachel; "laugh before breakfast, and cry before supper. Happy, indeed"—and therewith plunged a knife into a sweet-cured ham used for cutting rashers from, as though it were the Papal bosom.

At breakfast conversation was somewhat scarce, Robert, though willing to answer when spoken to, and fully alive to the claims of appetite, evincing a settled inclination towards silence, not to say forgetfulness of his surroundings, which to one person, at least, furnished matter for reflection neither sweet nor comfortable.

"He is vexed with himself already," thought Tryphena, miserably; "he has said more than he intended, and he does not know how to unsay it, and he blames me. You have no butter," said she, aloud, to this grave victim of remorse. If only he would look at her!

But he looked at the butter-dish—being innocent.

Few things are so radically opposed each to each as the ways of thought pursued by men and women. A woman turns an aim over and over in her mind, accomplishes it, and forth-

with looks about for another; a man sees, does, and sits down to think what he has done. Tryphena, having plighted her troth, was by this time as good as married, settled at Kirton, and known as the friend of the friendless for miles; Robert, though no less satisfied of the finality of the contract into which he had entered, was bent rather on the removal of present difficulties, than ecstatic consideration of the future. The ham and eggs eaten, and the teapot drained to dryness, Mr. Fowke rose from his chair, put on his straw hat, which he had cast on the floor previous to saying grace, having already commenced work—the day would be a busy one—and strode to the door.

"Where shall you be if any one asks for you?" inquired Aunt Rachel, rising likewise.

"That depends on when they ask."

Miss Fowke's lips lessened, and she set one cup in another with superfluous energy.

"When I went to school," said she, frigidly, "I used to be told that a civil question deserved a civil answer; but now rudeness seems the best proof of wit. Well," this to Try-

phena, who just then looked up wonderingly—"what are you staring at? You'd better get something to do, I should say."

"Very well," smiled the girl, and pushed back her chair, "I will go and make the beds."

"You don't make mine," came the prompt response; "I shall want some sleep by the time I get laid down again, after such a night as I've had—twisting and turning like an eel on a gridiron. I hope you don't hear the rats much in your room, sir?" addressing Robert; "I've been going to ask you ever so many times, but something has always put it out of my head."

"No," replied he; "not at all. I didn't have a very good night, though, all the same."

Tryphena turned towards the door. Something in his tone warned her that flight waxed advisable.

"That cake!" said Aunt Rachel; "I'll have no more plums from Gregory's. Twice has he served me like this, sending second best for best, just because I wasn't there to check him. But though I'm not suspicious, nor inclined to grudge a man his rightful profit, I do like

honest dealing, specially by them who deal honest themselves, and stick to old friends, let new comers be as pushing as they may."

"Yes," smiled Robert; "but the principles on which trade is now conducted can scarcely be called high. It was not indigestion, however, which made me wakeful."

Tryphena disappeared into the passage.

"Indeed!" said Miss Fowke, "weren't you warm enough, then?"

"Yes," he replied again—"quite!"

Aunt Rachel regarded him with some surprise, roused thereto by his manner, which struck her as strange, he being, as a rule, free —not to say copious—of speech, and little given to hide his thoughts.

Looking up, their eyes met, and he broke into a short nervous laugh.

"The truth is," said he, pushing a fork backwards and forwards, like one hard pressed by doubt, "I've got something to tell you!"

She stood silent. "Hear first, judge after," was a maxim which had ever won her warm approbation.

"I do not think," pursued Robert, finding that he must speak unaided, or sit mute,

"that you will be surprised, because you must have seen what was coming all along, unless I am a much more able hypocrite than I give myself the credit of being; but—I have asked Tryphena to be my wife: the strongest desire that I possess is that she should be my wife; and I now beg you to add your 'yes' to hers."

For a moment or two Aunt Rachel remained motionless, her hands resting on the table, her eyes bent upon the hearth.

"Then she has said yes?" observed she at length.

Robert smiled, and looked away at the frost-gemmed window. His eyes made answer.

The rigour of Aunt Rachel's countenance relaxed.

"It is no wonder," said she, and sighed.

To one standing on the threshold of decline, love's lightest laughter has a mournful ring, like some gay dance tune, heard through walls girt of death.

"But do you object?" questioned Robert; "do you think Mr. Fowke will object? I have spoken to you first, in the hope that you would plead our cause if he seemed inclined to create obstacles."

But Miss Fowke shook her head.

"That I fear," smiled she, dryly, "would do more harm than good. Jacob's not easy to persuade at any time. We none of us are, 'tisn't our way. We take a long time to make up our minds—I dare say, now, Tryphena's been considering what she should reply if you did ask her for weeks—but when we once have come to a decision, no power can move us. Besides, of late everything that I've said has been taken amiss. No," shaking her head again; "it's no use to look to me for help."

"Still," urged he, "you wouldn't mind having me for a nephew—personally?"

"Dear, no!" smiled she; "I could wish for nothing better. You've got your fancies, and you might think less of your own cleverness. But what's twenty-six? I don't count a man full-grown before he's thirty, taking the shortest reckoning. And Tryphena's a good girl, though I do sometimes have occasion to find fault with her. But our side's not the only one. There's your friends to be considered. How will they like your marrying into a family which, although old enough in its way, and——"

"My friends," interposed Robert, "are, I assure you, far too fully persuaded of my total exemption from the bonds of propriety and reason to trouble themselves concerning my actions. They stare at me and I laugh at them; that is the extent of our intercourse."

"Dear, dear," said Aunt Rachel, "what ways! But then you've no brothers or sisters, and cousins, however much you may like 'em, are never quite the same as those you've been brought up with. Still"—with weight—"judging from what's gone before, I don't think you need fear Jacob. Six weeks ago I might have said different; but now you and he seem so very friendly."

"I have certainly noticed an alteration in his manner," returned Robert, thoughtfully; "perhaps he may have divined my hopes."

Aunt Rachel brushed some crumbs into the palm of her hand slowly, as if considering.

"He is very sharp," she answered, "and sees things quicker than you'd fancy; but I don't know."

"When do you think I had better speak

to him—after dinner? It is not fair to Tryphena to put it off longer than I can help. Naturally she is as anxious as I am."

"Poor Phenie," smiled Aunt Rachel, tenderly—"poor motherless little creature; but you will be good to her, sir? You will remember that she is but a child, so to speak, and has lived with plain people all her life—you will forgive her not being able to take to your ways, perhaps, all at once?"

"Miss Fowke," said the young man, earnestly, "my life lies at her feet. She may do with me as she will."

Aunt Rachel gazed at him lovingly.

"You speak well," said she, "and you mean well. You may not think like me—you may, indeed, be quite unawakened and in the dark; but I know an honest man when I see him, and there's my hand on it, and—and"—searching blindly for her pocket—"you'll excuse my foolishness, but I've brought her up ever since she was two years old—and——"

Robert got up and walked to the window. His own heart was full.

"There," said Aunt Rachel, presently,

restoring her bandannah to its capacious sanctum—"now I feel better. I know it's stupid, and quite uncalled for, but lately, I'm sure I don't know why, I've got that weak that the least thing will upset me; but"—turning back to the breakfast-table—"you were saying something about Jacob?"

"When I should speak to him, that was all," answered Robert; "I thought perhaps after dinner would be a good time."

Aunt Rachel deliberated.

"Well, no," said she, "I should prefer the evening. After dinner he's always a bit sleepy, or, if he isn't that, he's in a tearing hurry to be off somewhere; but when work's over and the house is quiet, and he's set down with his pipe——"

"Ah!" smiled Robert, "I see. Well, then, in patience I will possess my soul until to-night. What time is it now?"

"Oh!" laughed Aunt Rachel, "the eagerness of you young men!"

"Eagerness!" he echoed; "who would not be eager in view of such a prize?" and took a

turn about the room, carolling lustily, to a tune of his own making:

> "Bid me to live, and I will live
>   Thy Protestant to be;
> Or bid me die, and I will give
>   A willing heart to thee.
> A heart as soft, a heart as kind,
>   A heart as sound and free
> As in the whole world thou shalt find,
>   That heart I'll give to thee."

For he felt rarely gleeful; and I suppose the demurest of us, having due regard for fact, would find it difficult to prove complete equality of temperature under all circumstances, at all seasons.

Yet considered soberly, the position of this very wild young man was no whit stronger or more favourable to the accomplishment of his desires than it had been last night, yesterday morning, for days.

That Tryphena, accurate religionist though she was, must ultimately, being human, recognize his claims to her approval, seen simply as a male creature, without reference to cause other than physical, was a matter concerning which he, despite his prompt assumption of despair at a certain critical moment not yet

quite part and parcel with the past, had from the first entertained small doubt.

Thus her confession of his dearness, though delightful, an inexhaustible source of rapture which once arrived at—like a full stream in a land where no water is—freed man from care, partook rather of the character of a luxury, than an active agent in the happy crystallization of affairs. And from Aunt Rachel no help could be expected. Her readily-expressed sympathy and willingness that he should be admitted to family privileges and the honour of connection, likewise upon reflection proved more agreeable than essential. The question still had to be put—to the master alone must one look for that yea or nay on which depended nothing less momentous than the complexion and fashioning of two lives. Well might Robert sigh impatiently, I think, as the ruddy glow of enthusiasm faded from his mind, matter of fact predominant again, he turned from the window, and pulling a chair towards the table sat down to examine some bills recently sent him by his steward.

Truly, Time owns other measurement than that of wheel and mainspring.

Of the effect produced on Aunt Rachel by the news thus suddenly imparted to her —news the suddenness of which lay principally, however, in the manner of its telling, she having, as Robert surmised, seen "what was coming" for some time—it is not necessary to say much.

An honest woman to the verge of eccentricity, and truthful in every thought, her expressions of satisfaction must be accepted without reserve. Indeed, she was thoroughly, unfeignedly glad that, to use her own homely phrase, these two young people had "hit it off together." Mr. Valoynes was better off than they were, and no doubt you could put the Grange inside Kirton without feeling it, and for the first year or so the child might miss her home and them she had been accustomed to—for riches couldn't root out love any more than they could sow it—and though at times there had been little upsets, still one's own were one's own, and nobody else was like 'em; but before long, please God, there would be a babe to knit them closer, little feet would patter to and fro through the great rooms and corridors, and childish laughter make life most

musical. And when they came south—say in the summer—Robert, Tryphena, and the Boy——Aunt Rachel overfilled the kettle as she pictured that contingency, so potent was the magic of her imagination.

At length, the kitchen having regained its normal aspect of trim comfort—the kind of comfort suggested by a wooden arm-chair—to ascertain how matters were progressing on the second storey assumed the aspect of a duty alike peremptory and attractive.

"Don't keep her up there all the morning," remarked Robert, looking up from his figures as, armed with short brush and dust-pan, this incorruptible guardian of domestic virtue walked towards the door; "remember, my days are numbered!"

Aunt Rachel's face clouded. It were difficult to determine which she disliked most, levity or interference.

"I shall not keep her longer than is necessary, sir," returned she stiffly; "it is not my way to invent jobs. Let a young person learn from experience, I say, taking her life as she finds it, and doing the best she can; but neither do I approve of shirking; besides you have all the afternoon before you."

"Yes," smiled Robert; "but what's an afternoon?"

Aunt Rachel sought calm in flight.

Still, when she encountered the occasion of her perturbation (referring solely to first causes) upon the landing, the patchwork counterpane over her arm, a certain anxiety perceptible in her clear eyes—amusement rather than severity ruled her expression.

"Well," said she, dryly, "and so you've a mind to play madam?"

Tryphena's cheeks waxed red.

"Nay," said Aunt Rachel, taking her by the arm, "'tis nothing to be ashamed of—rather should you be proud that he has asked you, so noble-looking as he is, and rich too, with a house lords might envy."

"I am proud," replied the girl, softly—that shy, childish smile, which in the eyes of some persons, and those not wholly undiscerning, constituted well-nigh her chiefest charm, flickering about her mouth—"but not because of his house or riches; he would be the same to me were he a beggar. I was afraid, though, that you would not like it, that you would think I must"—this, hanging her head and

pinching up a bit of counterpane—"have been too forward."

"My dear," smiled the elder woman, "I think I know you better than that. I may sometimes have seemed sharp, Phenie, perhaps over sharp, but I always have had my reason—namely, your good; and now you reap the benefit, for Mr. Valoynes would never have made you an offer had you been a fly-away, giggling creature like—well, like some of them fine Coatham misses."

The "fine Coatham misses," their ringlets, their mode of walking, even the fashion of their shoes and the crowns of their bonnets, were standard apologies for the overflow of sarcasm at the Grange.

Tryphena laughed.

"Then," said she, looking up, bright as the spring earth after rain, "you don't mind?"

And Aunt Rachel set down her dust-pan and laid her hands on her shoulders, and stooping, kissed her once on the forehead with the deliberate gravity of one who sets a seal to some weighty contract.

"May God bless you!" she murmured, "you have a vast deal to think of."

That was the second kiss which had passed between them during the last three years. The first followed on Tryphena's union with that little company of devout souls known as regular communicants.

A significant coincidence.

CHAPTER VII.

ALTERING LIGHT.

AS the day advanced it became evident that the promise of sunshine afforded by that expanse of golden cloud, whereto your attention has already been directed, was no hollow concession to human weakness, but rather the herald of reality. By eleven a brisk breeze, which on the downs might be cold—the kind of breeze that curls the crests of waves, and plays at ball with blown foam ashore, but which, ruled by the great hills and ample woods, kissed cheeks, stirred leaves at Shobdon tenderly as though laden with scent of roses, heavy with the faint odour of bee-favoured limes—sprang up to chase all clouds ocean-wards. By twelve Sol marched forth apparelled

gloriously; truly the most enjoyable of days.

"You'll be for having a walk this afternoon, I expect?" remarked Aunt Rachel, as she rolled an apple across the table towards Tryphena, who was seated by the window, deep in the attachment of a button to one of Robert's riding gloves; he, pen in hand, regarding her the while, with eyes full of tranquil happiness.

"Yes," he answered, "that is, if my lady there approves."

"Oh," smiled Tryphena, demurely, "you need not make that stipulation. I am nobody. I always do as I am bid."

"Since when have you found that out?" observed Miss Fowke; "I've known you night and day sixteen years come next January, and it's escaped my notice."

Tryphena laughed.

"One has to be a little in advance of fact sometimes," said she, placidly, "or life would be too dull. But," looking up at the open door, roused by the sound of footsteps, "here is John!"

"Eh?" ejaculated Aunt Rachel, knitting up her brows, and bending forward over a huge pasteboard.

"Good-mornin', mum!" smiled Mr. Tapp, halting on the threshold—his boots were none of the cleanest—and touching his battered hat, "the maister 'ave sent me to say as 'e shan't be in to dinner, but 'ud like a bit o' bread and cheese, just put up in a piece o' paper, if so be as you could let 'im 'ave it by me now."

"What's the reason of that?" demanded Aunt Rachel, rubbing her hands on her apron; "when I've boiled that salt leg, too, and had greens pulled on purpose. Dear, dear, how contrairy things do go, to be sure!"

"They do," was the stolid answer, "on-common! You wasn't to be pertickler, mum, as to what you sent, so long as 'tweer summat substantial."

"Substantial!" echoed Miss Fowke, as she brushed past him into the larder; "does he want a deal board?"

Robert rolled up his papers.

"Let me find you a bit of tape," said Tryphena, pulling off the glove into which she had just inserted her diminutive fingers in mockery of its hugeness, to dive into the hidden depths of her workbox; "there,"

producing the desired fragment, "shall I tie it for you?"

"Please!" replied Robert, and leant back in his chair luxuriously.

John smiled. He began, he thought, to see a little "what Patty 'ad been a droivin' at t'other night."

Suddenly Tryphena looked up at him.

"It do be reer weather, miss," observed he, with quite Machiavellian subtlety, caressing his stubbly chin; "we shall ev the wheat sproutin' a'most afore it's sowed, if it keeps on loike this!"

"Yes," said Tryphena, and rose to take a mug from the dresser, it being customary to treat John to a drink of cider when occasion fitted.

"What's that about the wheat?" questioned Aunt Rachel, reappearing, meat-pie in hand, and then, without waiting for a reply— "there, I'll just cut this in half—one bit you can have, and the other'll do for the master; and here's the key, Tryphena. Look sharp, it's almost dinner-time!"

A brief space, and Tapp, moist-lipped, well pleased—the missus's pasties were matters of

history in Shobdon; the man who stayed appetite therewith might well hold himself approved of Providence—took his departure.

"And as fine a leg as ever I saw," observed Aunt Rachel, as she subsequently forked that steaming and fragrant member on to its appointed dish, "with plenty of fat, and plimmed up to a nicety; but what's that to a mind given to folly, if nothing worse? You see, sir," turning to Robert, "I was right when I advised you to put off speaking till the evening."

"Yes," smiled he, and stroked a soft, pink cheek. Was it really so very lamentable a circumstance that Mr. Fowke should for once outrage habit, and eat his daily bread without knife or fork—"under a hedge, like any tinker," to adopt sorrestral imagery?

Justice done (a proceeding of more than ordinary difficulty to persons whose thoughts dwelt on that ethereal form of refreshment derivable from the meeting of lip and eye, the pressure of hands, the utterance of words intelligible or the reverse, according to the ears which hear them, rather than the meat which perisheth), Tryphena glanced up at the clock;

it seemed such a pity to spend any more of this most lovely day indoors.

"Yes," said Miss Fowke, exercising that faculty of intuition which, psychologists tell us, occupies in the female mind the place of reason—"you may get on your bonnet, but I hope you won't come back up to your eyes in mud, as you did that afternoon you went to Charwood, because whoever may buy your clothes in the future, your father buys them at present, and extravagance don't meet his views, I do assure you."

"Oh, but," smiled Tryphena, "it wasn't my fault that I got into such a mess. Mr. Valoynes insisted that the ice would bear me, and of course I believed him," in a tone of mock reproach sweeter than approval.

"What!" exclaimed Robert, "you throw the blame on me—guileless, unoffending me? Miss Fowke, I hope you will not allow your native sense of justice to be blunted by any such misrepresentations."

"I don't know," smiled Aunt Rachel, "I've a notion that it's six of one and half a dozen of the other. Anyway, once is enough; so don't let me have occasion to speak again."

"Very well," replied Tryphena, "I will be as good as gold if only you won't be cross. I can't bear people to be cross when I am happy."

"Ah," said Aunt Rachel, "that's the way with you young folks. You think that all the world should dance to your piping; but tears will flow let who will marry, and death stays his hand for no man's courting."

"Still," urged Robert, "there is a time for all things. Life need not be one prolonged wail."

Aunt Rachel smiled.

"No," replied she, mildly, "by no means; but sorrow's more plentiful than joy, I think, taking it all in all. Nevertheless, 'tis but fitting for you to feel hopeful and light-hearted at a time like this, when you've just turned over a new leaf, as one may say, and can see nothing but pretty pictures on every side."

"Then," exclaimed Tryphena, "you think his life is no better than a picture-book?"

"You go and get ready," was the tart rejoinder; "I can understand the meaning of my own words without your assistance."

And the girl, laughing, went. What mattered praise, what blame, to one fenced about with love?

Freed from disturbing influences—Miss Fowke was fond of her own society, and would sometimes openly express regret that the idolatrous wickedness of Papists in attaching a supernatural significance to eremetical inclinations and a separate way of life, had rendered solitude impossible for persons who clung to a free Bible, and took delight in the study of Mr. Fox's "Book of Martyrs"—freed, I repeat, from disturbing influences by the departure of our lovers in quest of those blossoms which bloom at every season—blossoms than which none can be more fitly termed "everlasting"—the lines of the present, the shadows of the future, gained in clearness, as might words writ in lemon-juice when held before a fire. And midst the divers points provocative of interest thus made evident—to one who sees little that is new, it is difficult to grasp a novel set of circumstances, or apprehend the consequences likely to arise from quite unexpected actions—Mr. Latchet's opinion, what that highly-endowed gentleman would say

when he heard the news, stood out clear and prominent.

That he was in any way connected with or responsible for her prompt acceptance of things as they were, her readiness to aid fulfilment, Aunt Rachel would have stoutly denied. Perhaps she felt a little glad that he would soon see for himself how acute had been her appreciation of the relative values of conflicting forces; perhaps also she indulged in a hope that he might exhibit a becoming sense of the fitness of things—be properly impressed with the beauty of that natural law which bids youth mate with youth, links age with age, thus providing against the increase of misery and "hindering folks from making fools of themselves;" but nothing more—not the vestige of a particle of anything more, as she was an honest woman.

Thus, when on looking up from the arrangement of certain geraniums on a flower-stand in the hall—I have told you before how great a pride this obscure person took in her plants, finding in them, I believe, a variegated border for the hodden gray of domestic existence as effective as economical—her eyes fell on the

minister's broad figure, he being engaged the while in battling with the stiff fastening of the garden-gate, that pleasure should illume her countenance can be considered neither strange nor lowering.

"Let me, sir!" exclaimed she, hurrying out —the door was open—"we really must have that lock seen to. I've oiled it and greased it, till it's scarce fit for any one to touch, and yet it's no better. How are you this summer afternoon?"

Mr. Latchet smiled, and pressed her hand.

"Quite well, thank you," said he; "I hope you are the same?"

"Yes," said Aunt Rachel, turning towards the house, yellow and brown in the fast lessening sunshine—"I generally enjoy good health, thank God! although this unnatural sort of weather is apt to try me as well as those who are weaker; but I don't think it will last."

"No," replied Acts, "I'm afraid not. I say afraid, because I have just left the bedside of one whom an east wind would blow into her grave. Do you know Clara Bond?"

"Let me see," said Miss Fowke, gazing meditatively down upon the quartz-spangled

gravel, "do you mean Mrs. Bond's daughter who lives near the mill?"

"Yes," replied Acts; "a girl about eighteen with bright hair and immense hazel eyes. A very sweet young creature, but destined, I fear, to spend New Year's Day in heaven. Of course," he added, in a graver tone, as though anxious to blunt inference, "I do not mean that such a change is not wholly desirable, but change is change, and being weak, I cannot quite bring myself to think of that little empty bed without regret."

Aunt Rachel watched the quick movements of a sparrow which had just alit upon the lawn.

"Yes," said she, after a while, "you're right. Change is change. I say so the more feelingly, perhaps, because, as far as I can see, it seems likely that we shall soon have something of the sort amongst ourselves."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Acts, voice and face alike instinct with surprise.

His informant laughed.

"Don't look so startled," rejoined she; "it's nothing so very amazing. But come in and sit down; one can talk so much better indoors."

"Where is Mr. Fowke, then?" inquired the minister, following her into the hall.

But Aunt Rachel shook her head.

"That's more than I can tell you," replied she, gravely, and turned into the kitchen.

"And now about this change?" smiled Acts, as having set his hat on the table and unbuttoned his cloak, he disposed himself in Jacob's particular arm-chair—an arm-chair supposed to be inviolate, and of a dignity nothing short of awful.

"Well," smiled back Miss Fowke, stirring the logs to a brighter blaze, "Tryphena's got a lover!"

Acts moved not a finger, smiled on as though the fact thus communicated were pregnant for him with blandest satisfaction. Of a truth this dissenting parson—this preacher by the road-side—was more a law unto himself, controlling all his members, than are the majority of mortals.

"And," pursued Aunt Rachel, cheerfully, "that lover is Mr. Valoynes, which, as I said before, need surprise no one. who has lived in this neighbourhood for the last three months."

"No," said Acts, calmly, chafing his large hands—"no!"

"I don't say," she went on quickly, "that I'm altogether glad. Indeed I don't see how I could, thinking as I do; but since he's been here I've noticed a great change, and when the mind is pure, and sense of right strong, the spirit seems drawn towards holiness as a sacrifice to the altar. I hope you don't think I'm too easy."

"No," said Acts, again, nursing his knee—"no!"

"Because I'm sure no one can desire more to see their duty, or to perform that duty when seen, than I do. Five nights out of six have I laid awake trying to find out what was my right course of action. I shouldn't say that to every one for fear of seeming to court praise; but you're different; you I may say are just like myself, and I should be glad of your opinion."

Acts gazed long and steadily into the fire, into one ruddy cavern in the fire—a glowing red-hot cavern, fit den for any salamander, forge for the shoeing of the devil's fleetest horses.

"My opinion," responded he at length, smiling slowly, "is, I fear, scarcely worth having. I am so ignorant of etiquette, and the method of thought usual upon such occasions."

"Etiquette—method of thought!" echoed Aunt Rachel contemptuously—"what have etiquette and methods of thought to do with you and me? I want to know what you think—you speaking as an honest man, I listening as an honest woman?"

But he only laughed and stared harder into that ruddy cavity than before.

"I am really quite unable to form any judgment," reiterated he at length, "my means of observation have been so limited."

For a while Rachel Fowke regarded him in silence, then doubt, not unmixed with anger, narrowed the space between her brows, and mingled white with red.

"Maybe," said she, dryly, "you've your reasons for not speaking; maybe"——but her voice trembled—she turned away her head. Never a Fowke yet who gave way to emotion willingly, especially in the presence of one possessed, to judge from appear-

ance, of about as much capacity for sympathy as an image—a marble image, to be quite accurate.

Acts looked up in mildest astonishment.

"My dear good lady," smiled he, deprecatorily, "what are you talking about?"

Aunt Rachel's shoulders heaved.

"I am not aware," he pursued, "that I have ever given you occasion to——"

"No, no," sobbed she, "nothing of the sort. Pray don't take any notice. I shall be better soon"—again blindly searching for her pocket just as she had searched whilst conversing with Robert in the morning—"but what with one thing and another——"

"To be sure," soothed he, as if roused to sudden pity; "your nerves are shaken by this sudden influx of good fortune. You should take a tonic—rest a while from your labours. I am frequently tried in the same way myself."

"You don't take a tonic, though," smiled she, waterily, drying her eyes, "neither do you rest. No! I must just battle on, I suppose, as I've battled on all along, looking to the Lord for my comfort, and a sight of

heaven for my reward. But I wish Jacob was more open."

The minister seemed to meditate.

"What," said he at length, still nursing his knee and gazing down upon the hearth, "is his attitude towards the aspirant?"

"Do you mean by the aspirant Mr. Valoynes?"

Acts nodded.

"He hasn't been spoken to as yet. He didn't come in to dinner, and if he had, I don't think anything would have been said, because I, knowing his ways, recommended that they should wait till after tea, when he was set down, and could listen quietly."

"Ah," smiled Acts, "just so; but I should think there was little fear of his decision being otherwise than favourable. The temporal advantages likely to result from such an alliance are too perceptible."

"I don't know about that," was the prompt rejoinder; Aunt Rachel might make light of her brother's claims to respectful admiration herself—to censure the members of one's own family had from time immemorial been the established right and privilege of those who

by long continuance in well-doing had evinced true critical capacity—but to allow outsiders free expression of opinion——

"I don't know about that," replied she, promptly; "money we've never wanted, and a good home we've always had. Jacob has no need to clip his principles to fit his pocket; still, judging by his behaviour of late, I shouldn't wonder if he did give his consent. Though he's so contrary, you really can never tell."

"I suppose," observed Acts, after a pause, "that Miss Tryphena and her beau have gone for a walk? I fancied I caught sight of them at the other end of Long Meadow as I came from the mill; but being ignorant of the position of affairs, I thought I must be mistaken."

"Yes," replied Aunt Rachel; "they're out somewhere. Maybe if Jacob turns stubborn, I shall get into it for letting 'em go; but there, we've all been young once, and I didn't see what harm could happen; besides it was so fine."

"Yes," responded Acts, "a day filched from fairy-land, when to be unfortunate, alone,

seems a mistake little short of crime;" laughing hardly. "However, I must not stay. What I particularly came to say was, could you manage to give this poor girl Bond a call now and then? I did intend to have specially addressed my request to Miss Tryphena; but of course she will have no time now for visits to sick-rooms. She will be too much occupied in the contemplation of her own happiness;" not wholly without sarcasm.

"I don't know why you should say that," again retorted Miss Fowke; "I'm sure the child has always shown herself most compassionate towards suffering, and most anxious to do all she could for any who might be afflicted either in mind or body. I don't see why joy should make her less pitiful. I'm sure she'll be delighted to go and see the poor young woman, and take her a little pudding or a nice hot dinner, just as she may fancy. Tryphena's a much better girl than folks seem to think. I don't believe she's got an ounce of nonsense in her composition."

Acts laughed, and rose to his feet.

"I like your enthusiasm," said he, mildly; "it cheers one like a fire, and, to complete the

metaphor, burns brightest in frosty weather. Good-bye. I shall expect to hear great things on Sunday."

"You'll hear what there is to hear," was the quiet answer; "I make no secrets."

"No," said Acts, releasing her hand and taking up his hat, "nor should you, with an old friend like me."

Whereat she smiled, and turning, accompanied him into the hall. One other handclasp, and he sped quickly to the gate.

Sighing, Aunt Rachel refastened the hall door.

For pleasure, pain; for plenty, emptiness; for hope, dull doubt—of a truth, a "best possible world."

CHAPTER VIII.

VIOLENT FATE.

HIS brow scorched by—could it be the fervour of Miss Fowke's enthusiasm?—played on refreshingly by the still pleasant breeze,—his eyes painful with—could it be long gazing upon flame?—bathed in cool twilight, solitude making place for thought, silence inviting confidence, Acts, as he pursued his gray, homeward way, grew gradually familiar with calamity, beheld with dispiriting clearness the shape and texture of this thing which had befallen him.

For in his heart, in that secret chamber thereof which is as a court of final appeal for probabilities, possibilities, and the like lean

and unsatisfactory offspring of reason and imagination, this doctor for sick souls had hitherto maintained right of private judgment with a dexterity and success which had as yet set conviction at defiance, and made of despondency a laughing-stock.

To be plain, let Mr. Fowke's assertions be as unpalatable as they might, his manner as unpromising, Acts had never believed that when it came to yea or nay, when Robert Valoynes must either be given to understand that his room was held preferable to his company, or permitted to assume the position of a future son-in-law, he would hesitate for an instant concerning which course to adopt. He might choose to air his authority, might find a peculiar pleasure in tugging at his fellow-creatures' heart-strings, much akin to that derived by infants from the wire-occasioned gambols of stick-embracing apes; but sportive impulse is one thing, and matured principle is another. A man might as well rule his conduct in the counting-house, the sphere of usefulness, on the battle-field, in accordance with the tactics of the nursery, as allow his indi-

vidual likings to shape decisions alike irrevocable and far-reaching.

And Jacob was no slave of affection—no soft-hearted, weak-minded apologist for youthful inconsistencies, ready to break forth in a tempest of reproaches to-day, to forgive and bless to-morrow. All his life long he had entertained a profound aversion to his betters—a hatred of free thought so virulent as to be barely within the pale of Christian charity. Was it likely that even to gratify spite—Mr. Latchet was no mean dissector of motives—he would accept a superior and freethinker, a man for whom, moreover, he had till recently evinced something akin to spontaneous dislike, as his daughter's husband, the father of a son, of sons who would in course of time reign in his stead, inherit that local greatness whereon he set such store?

Absurd! In the name of common sense, order, the condition of being, absurd!

Now, however, no such assurance rang forth in answer to Acts' questioning.

He had got a step farther into the gloom, and that step a long one, and with this change

of standpoint came change of view, change undesirable as undesired. Quickly he trudged on, eyes bent on the hard white ground, his hat now pressed over his swart brows, now lifted from his head, as though a hindrance to reflection, his face dark with sorrow and perplexity.

Tryphena was so dear to him. She was dear to others—could not be otherwise than dear—but to him she was precious as the promise of salvation. "With her to refresh and strengthen me," thought he, sadly, "I should regain faith, hope, purity, all that I have lost—all that I am now losing. The constant witness to her sweet perfection, my mind would become clear and calm, as a pool smiled on by the sun; knowing her mine—my own—one with me to the last hour of life, these gross anxieties which now sully each upward aspiration, and bind one to earth like chains of iron, would relax their hold. What matter this small luxury or that, this man's good word or that man's unfriendliness, when at home dwells one whose smile is ecstasy, whose voice shames music, in the touch of whose

lips lies heaven ?" The man's mouth grew bitter, and the fingers of his right hand gripped the palm as he thus accurately fathomed the extent of his deprivation.

And underlying this weight of wretchedness lurked one other feeling, which, as a source of mental heaviness, may not easily be rivalled, and which, I think, by the exercise of a little sympathy, will be found neither unnatural nor surprising :—I mean mortification.

Acts Latchet, though, being a man of sense, well aware of the advantages conferred by wealth and position on their possessor, still had his private system of measurement—a system applicable rather to a man's intellect than his substance ; a system whereof the principle is familiar, but use varied.

Tried by this test, Robert Valoynes appeared in the light of one who, owing such claims to respect as were his rather to the influence of circumstances than individual greatness, could by no possible feat of logic be pronounced a fit object for that magnanimous admiration which results in self-sacrifice, or entitled to appropriate goods already set apart for others.

Yet self-sacrifice he did demand—not from an equal, mind you; from a superior.

"How dare he rob *me*?" questioned Acts, with proud emphasis.

And not only did this most unseeing young man commit this outrage on right and decency, but his commission thereof appeared to occasion amused interest rather than that abhorrence it so certainly deserved.

Truly it was no wonder, I maintain, that hurt self-esteem — mortification should lurk beneath and sharpen grief. But woful pondering of the purely retrospective order seldom tends to rapid motion. Thus much Acts learnt before he had accomplished the first two miles of his journey, and at half-past five some dozen young women would assemble in his study for the purpose of reconsidering the history of David, and generally improving their acquaintance with Old Testament truths. Clearly he must make haste. Re-pocketing his watch, the which he had extracted from the depths of a capacious "fob," to ascertain the precise extent of his liabilities, he turned back, climbed over a stile to his left, and started

off at a Highlander's trot down a narrow footpath, traversing the meadow thus attained in a slanting direction, and the commencement of a short cut to Coatham, which, though little used by the village folk—being, like most short cuts, if anything a rather more devious way of going than that indicated by the signpost—still afforded him some slight convenience, terminating not far from his own house.

For a winter's afternoon—it was the death day of one Izaak Walton—the atmosphere was curiously clear, a circumstance attributable, Acts thought, to the moon, which, risen an hour now, reigned luminous in the pale, cloudless sky. Away under distant hedges, over the frost-strewed furrows, floated white gauze-like mist, but round about, far as the eye roved unintentionally, objects stood out plain as at noontide. Succeeding to this field, wherein the minister chased time, lay a thick fir plantation, the property of Mr. Fowke, as indeed was most of the land about Shobdon. Then came another field, devoted by that gentleman to grazing purposes, and

at present tenanted by those fat beasts adverted to by Martha Tapp, then a winding lane and Coatham. To clamber over the intervening stile, to hurry through the still green wood, carpeted with cones, dead fern, and fallen bramble leaves, fragrant with the keen odour of stripped bark, to regain light, and that sense of freedom inseparable from space, was a matter of moments to Acts, trained by habit to agility, and muscular as a University waterman. But fairly free of the trees, his feet on the short damp grass, a sight met his eyes which barred progress much as might an aggressively-inclined bull, a venient cannon-ball—something as monstrous and appalling as it is in the power of the human imagination to conceive. And yet viewed dispassionately nothing monstrous or appalling could be seen. Merely Farmer Fowke hard at work, digging a hole at the foot of a tree—a tree standing so close to the hedge which ran at right angles to the stile that in summer, when its vast boughs were robed in green, it gave shelter to blue-bells and orchises and ragged robins this side and that; a tree which was an oak, and had

once upon a time, so went the tale, served for couch and refuge to a young and tattered gentleman who later showed the world how to flout care in a place men called Whitehall; a tree of the sort nick-named historical—and great.

Acts stood and gazed, scarce seeming to draw breath—then he moved forward. Being, as I have said, light of foot, the noise made by him in coming through the wood, and crossing the stile, had been very slight—so slight, indeed, that Jacob, engrossed in what he was about—a rather mysterious "what" be it observed—seemed quite unconscious of his nearness, plying the small pick which he handled with desperate energy, almost like one who laboured under fear of being surprised.

On stole the minister.

Suddenly his eyes lit on Something lying on the ground. With a movement sudden as the precipitous rush of a snake about to strike, he, darting forward, covered it with his right foot.

A shout of terror broke from Jacob's lips. Facing round, his pick swung high above his

head, his cheeks blanched and drawn, he staggered backwards into the ditch.

"Wha—what d'ye want?" gasped he, lowering his weapon, and laying a trembling hand on a stout blackthorn stump which grew within his reach; "I thought," with a weak attempt at a smile, "'twere Old Nick himself."

Acts looked at him, looked at him steadily —looked as though he would look through his small pale eyes right into the darkest recesses of his small evil brain. Thus stood they a little space.

Then Jacob seemed to regain some of his composure—sufficient, at least, to allow of speech, and the deliberate seeking after meaning.

"Well," said he, coolly, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Yes," replied Acts, grinding his right heel deep into the grass, which here grew thick.

Again silence.

"Come," exclaimed Mr. Fowke, at length, assuming the tone and air of one who meant to be attended to, "if you've got anything to

say, say it; if not, maybe you'll walk on, and let me get my work done before dark. My time's valuable."

"So is mine," was the unmoved answer; "but, if I mistake not, it will suit you as well as me to waive active duty for conversation just at present."

"What d'ye mean?" exclaimed Jacob, fiercely.

"This," said Acts, strange triumph gleaming in his eyes, lightening over his dark face, vibrating in the tones of his low, deep voice, "that I've caught you at last; that"—speaking through shut teeth—"I've got your life in the palm of my hand—beneath the sole of my right foot," with insolent, hushed laughter; "your life—the life of Jacob Fowke—master of Shobdon—tyrant! oppressor of the poor! —R——"

"Hold!" shouted Jacob, springing forward —"or"—brandishing his pick—"by heaven, I'll knock your brains out!"

"Do it, man!" smiled Acts, fearlessly—"do it!"

A sinner he might be, but cowardice ranked not among his failings.

With a sullen growl, such as might more fitly issue from the jaws of some cowed and savage brute, than the mouth of one regenerate, Jacob fell back a step.

The smile still flickering on Mr. Latchet's lips grew derisive.

"Ha!" said he scornfully, "it's not worth while to swing for a man you can get nothing by—not even the fun of frightening him—is it?"

"Don't you mock at me," retorted Jacob, hoarsely; "you aren't——" But here he paused, turning his head aside as if to listen. "What's that?" questioned he, scarcely above his breath, "hark!"

And as he spoke a vague sound, as of something, some one moving on the other side of the hedge, became distinctly audible.

"A bird, most likely," replied Acts, "or a rabbit. There was no one in the wood as I came through."

Jacob raised himself on tiptoe, craned up ward his long neck, peered twixt twigs and branches, but could see naught animate.

Still his suspicions remained unallayed.

"That was no bird!" muttered he, dropping the pick, and his hands on his knees, bending down to take a more minute survey; "and as for rabbits, there's not one about the place. If any one"—this in a louder tone, threateningly—"is lurking hereabouts, he'd better be off before I get hold of him, if he doesn't want as sound a thrashing as ever he had in his life!"

It was a relief to shout wrathfully, with a view to awakening terror, even if the ears invaded by one's superiority belonged to creatures gifted with no higher reasoning faculties than those usually possessed by the ordinary denizens of rural solitudes, biped and quadruped. Mr. Fowke felt better for that display of pulmonary force.

"Rascally thieves," continued he with animation, "just let me catch 'em on my land, that's all. I'll warrant they don't want to come back again, or any one else"—with a fierce scowl at Acts—"whom I don't care to see there. I've put up with enough."

"Nevertheless," smiled Mr. Latchet, as placidly as though he were conducting the most elegant of dialogues, a series of jeux

d'esprits suggested simply by lack of intellectual excitement—"I trust that your power of endurance is not totally exhausted."

"Pooh!" ejaculated Jacob; "think I'm going to stick here all night listening to your rubbish? You just walk on and leave me to myself, will you? This field ain't a meeting-house nor never will be—nor yet any field that's owned by me. I've other things to do with my land besides giving it up to parsons."

"Mr. Fowke," said Acts, becoming suddenly grave, "if another man in your position were to speak in my hearing as you now speak, what do you think would be my opinion?"

Jacob gave vent to an impatient "Pshaw!" and stared gloomily into the hedge.

"I should say," pursued the minister, still in the same cool tone, "that he was mad, a miserable Bedlamite—unfit to be trusted either with the management of his affairs, or his person."

"You would," smiled Jacob—"you would? then perhaps"— with ironical civility—"you'll allow me to inquire what you mean by my position? for"—waxing vigorous—"hang me if I can make out!"

"Really," said Acts, with admirable sang-froid, "that is odd! But you seem bent on providing me with agreeable surprises this afternoon"—laughing delicately; "however, to reply to your question. For some years an eagerly-welcomed visitor at your house, and to all appearance the possessor of your esteem, you have recently seen proper to treat me with marked discourtesy; also to broadly hint that any hopes which I may have entertained of entering into a closer connection were doomed to disappointment—you, actuated by malice—yes, malice and greed—intending to marry your daughter to a stranger and an atheist. So far so good; you were apparently free to do as you pleased. But fortune, in the same hour that I hear of my rival's triumph, how he has succeeded in gaining the affections of the girl I seek to make my wife, has given you, the arbiter, the judge on whom depends the ratification of their vows"—with another of those delicate low laughs—"into my hands, by the revelation of a secret so monstrous——"

Here, however, Jacob's face, ashen, rigid with wrath, flamed to such unusual ruddiness,

that surprise and even alarm checked the smooth flow of Acts' eloquence.

For a moment or two he remained silent, regarding Mr. Fowke with eyes expressive of no light anxiety.

"Well," exclaimed that gentleman, fiercely, "what are you staring at? Have my horns and tail begun to grow? or is there an imp of darkness perched on my shoulder? I have heard that saints see them things quickest."

The minister's brow clouded, and the outline of his mouth straightened.

"Man!" said he sternly, "your levity is detestable! You tempt me to——"

Jacob came a step closer.

"But," continued Acts, quickly, "that would be a course of action equally offensive to my feelings and my sense of honour. I would much rather that we came to terms."

"Oh!" laughed Mr. Fowke—"oh! you would much rather that we came to terms. What terms?"

Acts paused.

"That," replied he at length, "is a question

which I shall not answer till I know whether you are in earnest."

"Earnest!" echoed Jacob, advancing maybe a hand's breadth—"of course I am in earnest. Why shouldn't I be? Aren't you in earnest? Isn't every one in earnest?"

"Then," said Acts, holding up his hand, "stand still where you are, and listen."

And Jacob obeyed. That is, he stood still where he was; whether he listened, he alone could be judge.

"There is no need," pursued Mr. Latchet, "for me to mention the basis of this agreement into which I am willing to enter. You know all about it—what it is made of—what it looks like; so do I. Suffice it that such a basis does exist. Now, what I propose is this: I forget all that has occurred to-night, and in return you, when the man Valoynes asks your consent to his marriage with your daughter, shall——"

Jacob laughed.

"Ay!" exclaimed he, sarcastically, "I thought as much. But how can I be sure that you'll stick to your part of the bargain? Perhaps you think to make money, besides

getting your own way, to line your nest with feathers picked from the old bird's pinions, eh? But if you do, you're mistaken, mind that!" shaking his clenched fist; "ay, though you are so clever, and the Lord does set such store on ye. Besides," waxing warmer, "why should your word be worth more than mine? Who are you to blacken folks' characters and play tyrant? You've got no proof. I'll have nothing to do either with you or your agreements. Go your way and do your worst. Go your way, I tell you"—this furiously, seizing Acts by the shoulder—"or I'll smash every bone in your canting, hypocritical carcass!"

But for once Mr. Fowke became aware that a hiatus, and that of no inconsiderable extent, may separate a threat from fulfilment, a command from performance.

A west countryman bred and born, Acts could give as neat "a fall" as you will often accept or witness, even at Islington; moreover, during his sojourn in the north—that sojourn whereof the varied incidents had recently supplied the material for so many

animated discussions, he had by submitting to the lusty hugs of certain Cumberland and Westmoreland notorieties, added "a back twist" to the repertory of his athletic accomplishments, between which—as a means for the humiliation of aggressors— and a sledge-hammer, the difference, judging by effects, was wont to appear so slight to unscientific observers that occasionally it had escaped their notice altogether.

Roused—the wrath hitherto pent up beneath a thin crust of composure set free by that unmannerly assault on personal liberty, to leap and blaze, and with a myriad fiery tongues roar down meek Prudence, sleek Expediency—the minister, having flung off his cloak, seized Jacob, who was pushing him backwards, about the body, snatched him to him, crushed him between his long sinewy arms, as if he would, in mastering him, rob him of breath, of life.

Dumbly they grappled in the now mist-fraught dusk, beneath the smalt star-sprent heaven. An ox who was feeding a short way off—feeding as he had been feeding since the dawn, as he would feed again to-morrow and the day after, and for days, until the exigencies

of a festive season should cut short his cud-chewing—raised his great head and snuffed, and maybe wondered what men could find to fight about, when there was plenty of good grass to eat, and a water-tight shed to sleep in, and a clean tank to drink from, and more roots at one's disposal than one knew well what to do with. But those two-legged kind of creatures had odd ways of their own—ways with which a sober, well-disposed young ox would do wisely to meddle as little as possible. Phoo!

Backwards, forwards—now bending to this side, now to that—knee to knee, foot to foot, swayed, struggled, wrestled Acts Latchet and Jacob Fowke. Considerably taller than his opponent, it seemed at first probable that to the latter must fall the victory; but if Jacob's physique gave him the advantage, in science he was deplorably inferior; also, age had already stiffened his muscles, lessened his powers of endurance. Clearly the battle was a pitched one.

Suddenly, however, and unaccountably—for no sign of fatigue was visible in his set, resolute face, his well-balanced attitudes—Acts

slackened his hold, fell back a little, made as though about to accept defeat. With a savage gasp of triumph—lacking breath for articulate ejaculation—Jacob pressed forward, as though to bear him to the ground by sheer force, but at that moment his foot slipped, the next he was lying on his back, Acts' hand upon his throat, Acts' knee upon his chest.

The contest had been severe, the result sudden, and to some extent unexpected. For a while excitement paralyzed reflection.

Then Jacob, who had been partially stunned owing to his head having come in contact with one of the knottiest of the roots spread abroad netwise by the great tree which sheltered them, opened his eyes, and said faintly:

"Get up."

But Acts moved not;—no, not by so much as the hundredth part of an inch.

"Get up," reiterated Jacob, weakly—"you're choking me."

"Which is it to be, then," questioned Acts—"peace or war?"

Jacob growled.

"Well," smiled Acts, after a bit, giving him a gentle shake—he seemed to see his way so

plain, dark though it was—"which is it to be?"

"Let go!" returned Jacob; "I'm half strangled!"

And Acts did let go then. That is, at least he loosed his hold so far as to allow his captive to sit up.

"Now," said he, when that gentleman had panted and puffed and growled himself into something like his ordinary condition of being, "suppose you resume the reins of your understanding, and——"

"Damn," interposed Jacob sullenly, "you've all but broken my back. Don't that content you?"

"No," smiled Acts, tightening his grasp on Mr. Fowke's collar, the which he had retained, though lightly, throughout this brief colloquy—"not in the least. What I want is an acknowledgment from you in so many words that you do now and will henceforth accept me as your daughter's future husband."

"Ugh!" grunted Jacob; "suppose I say 'No?'—suppose I say, 'Go your way and do your worst?'"

"I shall go my way, and I *shall* do my worst!" was the composed answer.

Mr. Fowke smiled.

"You're a cool one!" said he, not wholly without admiration; "it wouldn't do for too many o' your sort to be about. Poor Bedlamites, Bedlamites like me now," with a low chuckle, "would have no chance at all unless they could catch ye in a lonely place of a dark night when——"

"Yes or no?" exclaimed Acts, sternly, "I've no time for fooling. Yes or no?"

Jacob hesitated.

"You'll do as you say?" observed he, at length, "you're determined?'

"Try me."

Still the man seemed unable to make up his mind.

"It's a darned hard thing," began he, protestingly, "that——"

"Very well," said Acts—"very well; perhaps you'll find a hempen rope softer!" and therewith rose to his feet.

"Stay!" exclaimed Jacob, scrambling up hurriedly, one hand on the small of his back—he felt the effects of that north-country twist

still, might think himself lucky indeed if he had forgotten them at the end of a week—"stay! I've no wish to act ugly. You and me's always been pretty thick—thick as thieves, I've heard it said. There's no occasion for a friendly bout like this to——"

"That's not the question," retorted Acts, promptly.

Again did Mr. Fowke take refuge in silence.

"I'll tell you what," said he, at length, in the tone of one who believed he had hit on a happy compromise—"if you like to come forward you shall have as good a chance as any one. There now—nobody could speak fairer than that—not e'er a parson in the land—" laughing a little.

Acts seemed to consider.

"Well, no," commented he, thoughtfully.

"And you're satisfied?" exclaimed Jacob—"you'll be content to hold your tongue if I stick to that?"

"Yes," replied Acts, "I shall, knowing what I do know; but mind"—impressively—"no sneaking, no double-dealing, no this thing to this man and that thing to the other."

"Trust me!" said Jacob, resuming his pick. "Oh, Lord, my back!"

"Ah," observed Mr. Latchet, coolly; "but that's a neat finish—indeed, I don't know a neater. It puts such a pleasant face on things. I must make haste, though. Shall you be able to see?"

To this query, however, Jacob, who had recommenced that work of excavation whereon he was engaged at the moment of the minister's appearance, vouchsafed no other response than one of those short hard coughs, into which he was wont to infuse such a variety of meanings.

Even he—the overthrown, the back-twisted—had his limits of forbearance, his shades of sentiment.

But the minister evinced no sense of injury, neither any surprise. He only laughed, and made his way across the grass—past that young ox with the tenor of whose reflections you have already been made familiar—to the path.

Twelve young women—rapt, high-minded, anxious to reconsider the history of David, and generally improve their acquaintance with Old

Testament truths, but shepherdless. Were ever twelve young women in such disastrous plight before?

"Leave them alone," mused Acts, "and they'll come home," and fell again a-laughing.

O gleefullest of shepherds.

CHAPTER IX.

SICK SMILES.

THE hands of the old clock pointed to ten minutes past five as Aunt Rachel, whose ears had been on the alert for the last half-hour—it was already dark, and there was no saying how Jacob, if he chanced to come in first, would view Phenie's absence—caught the sound of approaching footsteps, and hastened to the door to replace doubt by certainty.

"Come along!" cried she, espying two figures at the gate—the one great and cloaked, the other small and shawled—"do you know what time it is?"

"No," replied Robert, sauntering slowly up the path; "but what a heavenly night!" and as he spoke he gazed up happily at the star-strewn sky.

" It is past five," pursued Miss Fowke, who made it a rule never to encourage people in what she called "fantastical fullery," being quite beyond the reach of Nature's witcheries herself, having on one memorable occasion, when invited to make glad her eyes with the golden glory of a singularly splendid harvest moon, gotten her a tallow dip to aid discernment; which feat being recorded should, I think, at once and for ever set at rest any doubts that may exercise the mind of the patient reader as to her complete freedom from those weak longings and vague ecstasies common to the impressionable.

" It is past five," pursued this very clear-sighted person; "and you may think yourselves lucky that the master has not got home before you; but that's always the way with you sweethearts—give you an inch and you'll take an ell, for certain."

"Why not?" smiled Mr. Valoynes, composedly; "life is short and fate capricious. One may as well have what one can get."

Aunt Rachel's mouth waxed deprecatory.

"You don't mean it, sir," observed she, gravely, "or I should tell you different; but

you'd better come in and let Phenie get off her bonnet. There's no use in having words, if words can be avoided. No; we don't want you"—addressing Beauty, who was slyly endeavouring to effect an entrance unperceived, aided by the sheltering folds of a well-known brown gown—"you can take yourself off to the stable. Thieves and princes make their own company."

Like most rashly-snatched enjoyments, that meat breakfast, whereof the staple was cold mutton, and close abrupt, had already proved costly.

"Oh, no!" pleaded Tryphena, "the poor thing is so cold, for we have not been walking at all quick. Do let her have her tea by the fire; her feet are quite clean—see!" lifting up a thin white paw.

"Very well," replied Aunt Rachel, rather stiffly though. "Where have you been to?"—this turning back into the kitchen.

"Not far," replied Robert, taking off his cloak, the which Tryphena having possessed herself of, carried away into the hall—it was very pleasant to her to wait on him; she would like, she thought, to wait on him

always—"only through the village and across that field where the hayrick is, and down the lane. Tryphena seemed a little tired, I thought, so I did not like to take her any very great distance."

Aunt Rachel smiled.

"What, so careful already?" quoth she; "it's plain you'll be a model husband. But, did you see anything of the minister?"

"No," replied Robert—"has he been here?"

Miss Fowke nodded.

"Yes," said she; "he came not long after you had started."

"Indeed," rejoined Robert; "did you tell him about our engagement?" smiling somewhat broadly—somewhat as though the notion of that recital tickled his sense of the ludicrous.

"Yes," replied Aunt Rachel, lifting the kettle off the fire, "I did."

"And what did he say?" still smiling.

"Not much."

"Wasn't he pleased?"

Here, however, a loud shout of "Hi!" checked speech.

"It is Mr. Fowke," observed Robert, "whispering to the worthy John."

"I wish Phenie would be quick," was the somewhat irrelevant rejoinder; "she knows well enough that he will be cross if he guesses you were out so late. But girls are such simpletons. Tryphena!"—this from the bottom of the stairs, having hurried out whilst speaking—"come down at once; tea's ready, and"—in a lower tone—"your father 'll be in in a minute."

Light feet pit-patted through the corridor, a snatch of bright, sweet song governed the envious air—song now forgotten, whereof the burden ran, if I err not:

> "Some unforeseen delay doth cause him for to stay,
> But he'll be here—run on;"

a little dark-robed figure—little, dark, as it hath ever been the will of nightingales to be—came singing into sight.

And let me now pause a moment and gaze my fill on thee, dream-child, snow-flower, here blossoming alone 'neath skies funereal, on the bosom of an earth chill with perpetual frost! Let me imprint thee on my memory

thus, bathed in pale light, on thy head hovering a moon-made coronal, thy sweet eyes love-haunted, thy lips a-smile; round and about thee, for me at least, thy humble friend and chronicler, a most delicate, rare charm, as of some quaint lost scent strayed from known bowers to fairyland—some small, meek melody prisoned in disused lute, the sheen of mineral, plume, gem.

But to rhapsodize is, I have been assured, quite beneath the pen of a conscientious historian, although personal examination of the works bequeathed to time by not the least meritorious of this class of toilers would, I must confess, have led me to form a slightly different opinion; wherefore, Tryphena, linger no longer, and story, flow on to thy appointed end.

"Blow out your candle," said Aunt Rachel, "and set it on the table. Whatever have you been doing all this while?"

"I found that the dye had come off the inside of my gloves," replied the girl, gently, "and I could not get my hands clean."

"Humph!" ejaculated Miss Fowke; "more likely you've been staring at yourself in the

glass. Anyway, you'd better look sharp now; and remember"—turning round, and again lowering her voice—"I shall want you to come upstairs after tea, and help me to look through the table-cloths."

"Very well," rejoined Tryphena—if there was light sufficient it would be seen that she was blushing—and they entered the kitchen just as Jacob lifted the latch of the outer door.

"You'll see to that," bawled he to some one who stood apparently in the lane; and some one bawled back, "Ees, zur," in reply.

Then the door opened, and Mr. Fowke crossed his own threshold.

"Dear, how cold the air does strike," exclaimed Aunt Rachel, shrugging up her shoulders; "pray be quick and let us get shut in again. Why, how stiff you walk! Tryphena, child, find your father his old shoes."

And Tryphena found them in their usual corner by the fireplace, close to Robert, who smiled upon her benignly during the brief quest. But her obedience won scant gratitude.

"Nay," said Jacob, taking off his hat and seating himself gradually on the sofa, screwing his mouth on one side meanwhile, as though that operation were not merely attended with difficulty, but painful, "you needn't trouble; I shan't take off my boots to-night. Maybe I shall have to go out again. Wheugh!"

"Whatever's the matter with you?" inquired Miss Fowke, pausing in her tea-making to regard him with stern wonder—"have you got the rheumatics?"

"Yes," he answered—"yes," smiling grimly, "I've got the rheumatics!"

"Perhaps," suggested Tryphena, "if you were to put your feet in mustard and water——"

"Or my nose."

Robert laughed; Aunt Rachel looked cross.

"That's always the way," said she, aggrievedly, "you never will take any one's advice, you're so obstinate."

Mr. Fowke compressed his lips, and placed one arm in the small of his back. Clearly, he was very uncomfortable.

"It is strange," said Robert, seating him-

self at the table, "how suddenly these attacks will come on—I mean when one has not been sleeping in a damp bed, or wearing unaired clothes, or doing anything radically rash and ridiculous. I remember my father came home from Ambleside one day little better than a cripple, and to the end of his life he could never make out why, unless it was that he had on a pair of rather thinner boots than he was usually in the habit of wearing."

"Ah," said Aunt Rachel, "or it might have been suppressed gout. I've known that take the strangest forms. But, you see, my brother's boots are thick enough. Will you come to the table, or have your tea there?"

"I'll have it here," answered Jacob; "I don't want anything to eat."

"Nothing to eat!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, in a tone of consternation; "not a bit of bread and butter even?"

"No!" he rejoined, baldly.

Tryphena carried him his tea-cup in silence. She, too, now began to experience the first prickings of alarm, for so long as you could eat, so ran opinion at Shobdon Grange, there was not much the matter with you; but let

appetite fail, and the sooner you sent for the doctor the better.

" I can't think why you couldn't come home to your dinner," pursued Miss Fowke, aggrievedly, after a brief pause, " instead of wasting Tapp's time by sending him bothering up here after bread and cheese."

But this declaration induced no comment.

" And you missed a treat, too," she went on, " for a finer leg I never cooked; plump and sweet, and delicate as a chicken. Wasn't it, Mr. Valoynes ?"

" Yes," smiled Robert, " quite. Blessed among porkers be the memory of its late proprietor !"

" I thought," observed Mr. Fowke, moved to speech by the melting topic, " that that pig would cut up well. There's nothing like seeing 'em fed yourself if you want the meat to be white. Likewise there's two ways of killing 'em—you can either stick the——"

" Oh !" exclaimed Tryphena, clapping her hands to her ears—" oh !"

" What stuff !" rebuked Aunt Rachel; " where's the harm of talking of things which have to be done in broad daylight every day

that one lives? You liked your dinner well enough. I don't see the good of such squeamishness."

"Still," smiled Robert, "slaughter has its drawbacks. I know some people think it a fine thing to call a spade a spade. Very well, I say, call a spade a spade, by all manner of means, only don't call a spade a charnel-house."

Miss Fowke raised her eyebrows.

"It is as folks feel, I suppose," said she, after a bit; "some set more store by words than others. Anyhow, 'twas a fine leg of pork."

Which all-important conclusion being safely arrived at, the meal went on in silence, Tryphena fortifying nature much as might a rabbit devour lettuce in the presence of a boa-constrictor; even Robert's natural gaiety failing to protect him altogether from the noxious influence of the gloom thus suddenly evoked.

"Is your cup empty?" inquired Aunt Rachel presently, turning to the occasion of this blackness.

"Yes," replied he, sourly; "and it may stay so."

"Dear me!" was the dignified rejoinder, "you needn't be so very commanding. There is not the slightest reason for you to go against your taste. Phenie and me will divide what's left with pleasure, I'm sure!"

"Don't forget me," smiled Robert; "you know I swear by Bohea;" and Mr. Fowke smiled too, but not pleasantly.

"Get me some rum and water," said he at length; "I'm sick of the smell of this cat-lap!"

And Tryphena immediately arose and proceeded to the cupboard, wherein the spirit-bottle dwelt. What mattered to her personal ease, moral considerations, considerations connected with temperance, propriety, the feelings of others, so long as "father" was satisfied—"father" had that which he required? In this respect, I conceive this otherwise perfectly virtuous young person to have fallen short of that high standard of perfection whereto she desired to attain. So do we all at times—we loving ones. No such corrupt counsellor, believe me, as the heart, popularly designated the seat of the affections.

A tumbler procured, also a jug of hot water, a sugar-bowl, a teaspoon, and the bottle afore-

said, Mr. Fowke—these divers objects being conveniently set forth on a small round table at his elbow—evinced a certain satisfaction.

"Ha!" ejaculated he, sitting up with caution, aided by an arm thrown over the back of the sofa, "that looks something like; but I doubt whether I can pour it out."

"Then let me," promptly exclaimed Aunt Rachel; "I shall be sure not to give you too much. A table-spoonful and a half in"——

"Pshaw!" scoffed Jacob, seizing on the bottle—"you and your table-spoonfuls—stick to your teapot!" and therewith filled himself a bumper.

Robert laughed.

"You remind me of my old tutor," said he.

"Why?" inquired Jacob, having taken a sip.

"Because he used to declare that it was no wonder Zeus made Ganymede his cupbearer instead of Hebe—women, despite their manifold perfections, being proverbially dense on the subject of liquors."

But Mr. Fowke smiled not, neither betrayed he in any way appreciation of the reminiscence. A town—specially a metropolitan—dunce might have simpered and slapped his

thigh, and cried, "Good, by gad!" Not so this western employer of labour and local dignitary.

Ignorant of book learning he was, and ignorant of book learning he seemed destined, nay, desired, to remain, esteeming all such learning as the merest lumber; but to assume the possession of knowledge he owned not, to seem to be other than he was——

No!

And for this let us give him credit, him and his kind. There are thousands of Jacob Fowkes, speaking broadly, now sowing seed, rearing children, tyrannizing over their humbler fellow-creatures throughout Great Britain—happily for Great Britain. It is these men who to-day, as in sixteen hundred and forty, constitute the national backbone.

Clay pipe, tobacco jar, and tinder-box ranged in accustomed sequence, the tea-things moreover packed on the tray ready for removal, Aunt Rachel looked at Tryphena and Tryphena looked at Aunt Rachel; the moment for concerted action had arrived.

"Get your workbox," said Conspirator Number One, hastening away tray in arms,

"If we aren't quick, the evening will be gone before we've had time to do anything, and that linen has been on my mind for months."

"I know," replied Conspirator Number Two; "but hadn't we better wash up first?"

"No," rejoined the other from the passage. "Haven't I just said that we must be quick?"

"What are you going to do?" inquired Robert, with fine male obtuseness, taking a letter from his pocket, and gazing thereat absently—a letter writ by Matthew Thwaites weeks ago, on the back of which was scrawled in pencil, by way of spur to memory, a queer old proverb to the effect that "as the fool thinketh so the bell clinketh," which some one, he could not remember who, had lately repeated in his hearing; a quite antiquated letter, ripe for destruction—only he felt a little stiff, uneasy. I have heard that such sensations are occasionally experienced by young men in his position—young men on the eve of negotiating a father-in-law—and it was his habit, as it is yours, mine, that of all well-bred, clever, elegant persons, to be as little natural as possible.

"To look through some old table-cloths, and

pick out those which are worth mending," answered Tryphena, subjecting her needle-book to a rigorous investigation.

"There won't be many of that sort, I'll warrant," observed Mr. Fowke, loading his "churchwarden" by the aid of a crooked little finger; "it'll be, 'Oh, there's no good in wasting one's time on these old things; you must buy some more' "—with ironic emphasis.

Tryphena laughed.

"What a shame!" said she, "when I'm cobbling and patching from morning till night."

"Tryphena!" shrieked Miss Fowke from up-stairs—"are you coming?"

"Y-es—yes!" called Tryphena, and hastily snatching up her workbox, hurried away to defend in person the strict integrity of her intentions.

CHAPTER X.

A SPEAR FOR A SPEAR.

LEFT to themselves, Robert and his host seemed gradually to lose consciousness of each other's presence —shrank apart into diminished isolation, as will sea anemones at the approach of adventurous crab, or the sudden darkening of their aqueous heaven by the obtrusion of zoologist's grave countenance. Jacob smoked on, occasionally pausing to sip grog. Mr. Valoynes, seated at the table, the "Lyme Mercury" spread out before him, his head supported on his hand, absorbed such intelligence as it was in the power of the second and third pages of that meritorious journal to place at his command. Beauty, asleep before the fire, dreamt of old triumphs, trotted again, tail erect, over

stubble long since consigned to the rubbish heap, heard the whirr of wings, the whizz of lead, and dreaming yelped gleefully. Once a rat squeaked behind the wainscoting, and the crickets chirped at intervals, otherwise it was quite still—so still indeed that Aunt Rachel, during a hiatus in her labours occasioned by the saltatory excesses of a ball of darning cotton, averred that she "couldn't make it out, but feared that the master must have fallen asleep."

So far from this apprehension being justified by co-existent fact, however, its opposite, namely that that gentleman was becoming peculiarly and even unnecessarily wide awake, might have been entertained without self-exposure to the charge of rashness. Alcohol is varied in its effects—as varied as events and faces. Had Mr. Fowke partaken of strong rum and water at the close of a day marked by nothing more important than the successful carrying out of those agricultural operations in which he was normally engaged, it is very probable, and even certain, that an inclination to close the eyes, to open the mouth, to throw back the head, in short, to

doze, would have ensued; but so stood not fact. To-day had been marked by something very much more important than the successful carrying out of agricultural operations, marked, to be plain, on such a wise, that it bade fair to maintain pre-eminence among days to the end of time—using the word time in that restricted sense enforced by individuality. Wherefore as Jacob sat there on his straight-backed, hard, old sofa, his pipe in his mouth, his eyes fixed on vacancy, his hand every now and then stretched forth in quest of the tumbler at his elbow (now nearly empty) his mental faculties, instead of decreasing in vigour, increased; and at length, quite overcome by his own brilliance—brilliance as unusual as delightful—he observed, laughing huskily, and leaning forward to replenish the source of inspiration:

"Nothing like rum for rheumatism! You see, sir, they both begin with an r."

"Yes," replied Robert, pushing away the paper, and shifting his position, as though conversationally inclined; "is your back better?"

"No," was the tardy answer, "it isn't; nor do I suppose 'twill be just yet; but it don't matter—worse things may happen to a man than a fall."

"A fall!" echoed Robert, in a tone of some surprise.

"Eh?" exclaimed Jacob, looking round at him from beneath brows suddenly narrowed by suspicion, "what?"

"I merely repeated your own words," returned the young man composedly.

"Oh! you merely repeated my own words, you merely repeated my own words; very well, then, I'm drunk"—laughing again—"mind that, and what a drunken man says can't be brought up as evidence against him anywhere. In no court of justice that ever was made will a judge accept the evidence of a drunken man, and I'm drunk, drunk as a lord!"

Robert's face, great as was his power of self-control, profoundly as he desired not only to be at peace with, but even respectful to, Tryphena's father, gradually assumed an expression of conviction, rather than incredulity or deprecation.

"Ay !" smiled that gentleman, noting his altered look, and resumed his pipe.

So they remained, it might be five minutes.

Then Jacob remarked, driving his elbow into the ample chintz-covered cushion against which he leant—cushion secretly splendid with divers radiancies in Berlin wool and floss silk, wrought by Tryphena tearfully at the tender age of nine years :

"It'll soon be time for you to be starting for the north."

Robert looked up as if startled.

"Well, yes," said he, constrainedly.

And again they relapsed into silence.

For neither of them dared be as bold as they desired, the old man in rudeness, the young man in opening out his heart. It was a tedious business.

At length, however, Robert, knowing that he must speak sooner or later, nay, that speech was even now essential—said, his eyes fixed upon his hands, the which he had clasped about his right knee :

"Could you favour me with your attention for a little while, Mr. Fowke ?"

Jacob took his pipe from his mouth, and gazed thereat thoughtfully, holding it 'twixt first finger and second as one might a cigar. This was a favourite attitude of his whilst engaged in mental debate.

"Well?" said he at length, finding that Mr. Valoynes awaited his pleasure, a fact of worth in his opinion, and comfortable, denoting the radical equality of man and man—equality akin to that discoverable amongst loaves in a baker's oven.

"The truth is," began that gentleman, "Tryphena and I have—have fallen in love with each other!" and laughed.

It seemed to him so natural to laugh at such a fortunate clearing up of divers anxieties.

"Oh," smiled Jacob, "Tryphena and you have fallen in love with each other. What else?"

"I wish to make her my wife!" returned Robert, his voice trembling a little—with pride, perhaps, that Valoynes of Kirton volunteered the avowal. No man may outlive himself, his own thoughts, his own emotions.

Mr. Fowke remained silent, his face expressionless as a wall.

"And if you will give her to me," pursued our prétendant, waxing importunate by reason of strong feeling—feeling such as spans oceans, crowds our pavements nightly with tattered miseries—"I will consecrate my life to her service, I will guard, cherish——"

"Pooh!" interposed Jacob, coolly, "what need for all that? Hasn't she got her aunt and me?"

"That, of course," replied Robert, quickly; "but we love each other, and no relation can be like a husband."

Jacob stared hard at a green and yellow jug which hung on the dresser.

"Mr. Valoynes," said he presently, "it's impossible!"

"Why?" inquired Robert.

"It is."

"But," argued Robert, "that is no answer at all, and Tryphena's happiness lies in the balance as well as mine. I will not be put off so easily."

"Then," said Jacob, straightening himself up—a proceeding scarcely calculated under

present circumstances to allay irritation—"I may as well tell you that you shall never marry Tryphena—never! And the sooner you leave my house the better."

Robert's cheeks, hitherto slightly flushed—he was of a clear complexion, though brown—waxed pale. He rose to his feet.

"Yes," pursued Jacob, laying down his pipe, "I mean what I say. You were brought here to get well, and well you've got; and you came back to rest, and rest you've had, and now you can go. I've seen as much of you as I care to."

"What did you mean, then?" demanded Robert, his eyes dark with wrath, "by pressing me to stay—by flinging your daughter at my head? God forgive me! What am I saying? Man! cannot you see that you are driving me distracted?" grinding his heel into the sanded floor, and clenching his right hand, so that the nails grazed the palm.

"Ay," smiled Jacob, "I see it very well, and glad I am to see it. D'ye think I've borne with your lord's airs all this time for nothing? D'ye think I've never said to myself, 'The day's coming when you'll have

your turn, when you'll be able to kick this fine gentleman, with his smooth words and mincing ways, and lily-white hands, clean out of doors—him and his fine beast, who's been eating your oats and beans as if 'twas all he could do to keep from being sick these two months, just as t'other's been eating your meat and puddin'.' Ah ! I've had my thoughts, and now you know 'em; and the sooner you get out of my house the better. Don't you think to overreach me. All the women in the world may cry themselves blind for me. What do I care for their crying, poor fools !"—with savagest scorn.

Robert shook his head. Had Mr. Fowke condescended to reason he might have evolved some answer. As it was, he stood dumb, as will abuse ever make stand a gentleman.

At length he turned himself about and walked towards the door.

Jacob watched him sullenly.

"Where are you going ?" demanded he.

"To my room," was the calm response, "to pack. It is, of course, impossible that I should remain another night under the roof of a man who has insulted me so grossly."

Jacob laughed.

"Ha!" said he, exultingly, "I've made you feel at last, have I!"

Here some one ran swiftly down the stairs, through the hall. A moment or two, and Aunt Rachel made her appearance, candle in hand, a prey, judging by her expression, to the liveliest anxiety.

"Whatever is the matter?" questioned she hurriedly.

"Nothing much," replied Robert; "only your brother thinks it better my visit should terminate."

With an ireful snort Miss Fowke swept past him to the dresser, whereon she deposited her candle after a fashion not a little indicative of hurt sensibilities.

"What can you mean by behaving in such a way?" exclaimed she, turning on Jacob with a suddenness and shrill fury calculated to awe the boldest.

"You mind your own business," retorted he, sulkily; "my behaviour's no concern of yours!"

"But it is," replied she, hotly, "when you,

just to gratify your nasty mean spite, which, as a Christian, you ought to loathe and wrestle with as if 'twere the foul fiend himself, want to break your child's heart. You shan't do it, Jacob, mind me. As long as there's breath in my body that you shall not do!" and Aunt Rachel smote the table with her clenched fist, and stamped her foot in attestation of the validity of this declaration.

"I'll tell ye what," said Jacob, slowly rising to his feet—"if you don't take care, I'll turn ye out all together—all three of ye—make a clean sweep"—mowing the air with his arm. "What are you to me? What do I want with you?"

"Not less than I want with you, you may be very sure," returned Aunt Rachel, stoutly; "there's no love lost between *us*. But, all the same, I'll not permit injustice or cruelty to be done in my presence or with my knowledge; and that you're acting both cruelly and unjustly now you know as well as I do, though you do curl your lip and look so grand."

"It is very kind of you, Miss Fowke, to

take our part so warmly," here interposed Robert; "but I am afraid you will do no good. Perhaps when Mr. Fowke sees that Tryphena's happiness really does depend on his relenting, he may relent."

But Mr. Fowke shook his head.

"Never," muttered he, "never!"

"Meanwhile, it is growing late, and as I shall have to ride some way before I can get a bed"—(Aunt Rachel's brow became puckered, and her mouth tremulous, like to the brow and mouth of one about to burst into tears; to think of a poor young gentleman being thrust out into the night, supperless, his mind torn with grief, knowing not whither he went, oh! it was enough to make your heart bleed, though the night was fine, and the moon did shine with uncommon lustre, and money was no consideration)—"I think I had better go and pack up my things at once. I have no wish to give you more trouble than I can help," this rather bitterly.

"Trouble!" echoed Aunt Rachel, grimly, "what's trouble, I should like to know, compared to the misery of living where you're not wanted, where everything you set your heart

on's denied you, where—but it'll all come to an end some day, that's one comfort; nothing keeps on for ever but God's justice. Don't you worry about your packing, sir; I'll do that. You'll have to saddle your horse. Fancy," in a louder tone, gazing with quite superb disdain on Jacob, who, having reseated himself whilst she was speaking, now lolled at his ease, slumberously, "letting a friend, or at least one whom you've always treated as a friend, and over and above that a gentleman bred and born, saddle his own horse or ride bareback. Fancy, refusing him a night's shelter, treating him worse than a common tramp! Oh! for shame, for shame! Sad am I to call such a mean wretch brother."

"Ugh!" grunted Jacob, and mumbled unintelligibly.

"Brute!" ejaculated Miss Fowke, and with a petulant whisk of her petticoats, which, ventured upon by a less eminent personage, might have been termed a flounce, turned her back on him and strode to the door.

As she passed Robert, their eyes met.

"I am so sorry, sir," said she, feelingly—"so sorry. But don't you be too down hearted.

Remember, Brag's a brave dog, but Holdfast's a better; and she's got to suffer too."

Robert bit his lip. That was the thought which hurt him worst of all.

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD-NIGHT—GOOD-BYE.



N reaching the hall Aunt Rachel was confronted by Tryphena, pale faced and scared looking.

"What is it?" whispered she nervously.

"Come upstairs," was the quiet answer; and upstairs they went one after the other, the girl holding on by the balusters, for her legs shook under her.

"Well," said she, when they had gained the corridor, "is it all over?" and smiled a little tremulous smile not good to see.

"I don't say that," replied Miss Fowke, gravely; "but your father won't give his consent—at present."

Tryphena shivered.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, catching

her by the arm, "you don't feel like fainting?"

"No," she smiled—"no; but it is cold—so cold!" and shivered again.

"Come to my room," said Miss Fowke, "and I'll give you some sal volatile. You're upset, and no wonder; but you'll be better presently. Come now!" persuasively, taking her by the hand.

"No," returned Tryphena, "I shall be better presently. It does not signify."

Aunt Rachel stood still and looked at her. Her face was, as I have said, very white, and her mouth sorrowful, but not a tear stained her cheeks.

"I would rather see you cry," observed Miss Fowke, thoughtfully—"much rather."

But Tryphena only smiled, and looked away up at a diamond-paned mullioned window through which the moon was staring at them blandly, as might some great lady of fashion, the victim of a languid interest in their very provincial and inelegant movements.

"What did Robert say?" inquired she at length, her eyes still averted.

"Say!" reiterated Aunt Rachel, just a little

nettled at her coolness, "what could he say? A man has small opportunity for speechifying when he is ordered to quit at a moment's notice."

The girl's face grew puzzled.

"Yes," pursued Aunt Rachel, with emphasis, "you don't know that part of it yet; but so it is. I ought to be packing his valise at this very moment."

Quick beat Tryphena's heart—a faint flush suffused her cheeks.

"He is going away?" she questioned, clasping her hands.

"Yes," was the grave reply; "your father gave him no choice. 'Twas go, or I'll make you go. I heard as much as that while I was on the stairs."

For a brief space Phenie stood motionless, as though deprived of sense and feeling; then starting suddenly, she exclaimed:

"Come, we must be quick—we must not keep him waiting," and hurried off towards his bedchamber, as though to expedite his departure were the most joyful of tasks Fate could set her.

"Lord bless the girl!" ejaculated Aunt Rachel.

But the valise dragged from beneath the bed, dusted, and set upon the windowseat, and this very strange and lapideous young woman somewhat fell off in her inclination to render assistance—seemed indeed more disposed to wander about aimlessly, to finger, to babble nonsense.

"I remember," said she, holding up a cream-coloured neckcloth dotted with black wafers, "he wore that the day he came back. How long ago is that, aunt? Three weeks next Thursday, won't it be? Three weeks only, and in that time I have changed from a child to a woman. I shall never be a child again, but I shall be a woman for ages and ages and ages. And there," darting at something small and glittering which lay on the floor, "is his pretty little forget-me-not pin. Do you know," pressing it to her lips, "that I have a great mind to steal you, you little pin, for you have lain in his bosom near where my head has been, and——"

"My dear," said Aunt Rachel, folding one black silk stocking in another, "you should not speak like that—it is not maidenly."

"Oh, but," cried the girl, laughing the

while, "I love him—I love him; and he is going away, and I shall never see him any more. If I do not say what is in my heart, it will burst. Martha has felt like that. Besides, girls never mind their mothers, and you are just like my mother, are you not?" laying her hot face—hot now, and gloriously tinted like to a Provence rose—on Aunt Rachel's shoulder.

That lady turned away her head.

"Phenie," whispered she, "don't you say any more, or you'll make me as big a fool as yourself," and a great tear dropped on her hand.

But Tryphena laughed loud and merrily.

"You silly!" scoffed she, "see! I do not cry. There is not a tear in my eyes. It will all come right, and if it does not, one can die. He will not care"—and a dry hard sob—"men never do, do they? But I want to ask you something. Do you think I might keep this?" thrusting her hand into her bosom and bringing forth the pearl-set enamel pendant which was shown to you one autumn evening in an orchard; "he bought it for me before he went

to Devonshire, but I would not take it then, because—because I thought it was too fine; but this afternoon he made such a fuss that—"

"It is very handsome," said Aunt Rachel, weighing it in her hand—"very. Dear, dear, what a fool your father is!"

"Never mind about that," interposed Tryphena hastily, "that does not matter. Do you think I might keep it? I know he would like me to—and there is a little bit of his hair at the back."

"I do not see how it could be wrong," replied Miss Fowke thoughtfully, her mind set, mayhap, on a certain crisp, bright curl, the which she had held precious through good repute and ill, in fair days and foul, for some twenty and odd years, could even now put her hand on, I make no doubt, if thereto invited fittingly—"just as a keepsake!"

"Yes," said Tryphena, "just as a keepsake;" and therewith restored it to Sanctuary.

"I thought," pursued she, seating herself sideways on the bed, "that I would ask you, because then I should have a witness ready in time of trial," laughing lightly.

"You are very strange!" returned Aunt Rachel, wrestling with a strap.

"Of course!" was the prompt rejoinder, "what else should I be? I do not cry, and yet I am the most miserable of creatures. Surely that is strange in itself. Can I help you?"

"No," said Miss Fowke; "it is done now. What about his gray coat, though? There is no room for anything more."

But Tryphena had no suggestion to offer. She only stared at her toes, little black toes, sticking out from beneath the skirt of her gray gown.

"Oh me!" sighed she at length, stretching out her arms wearily; then she slid down, and followed Aunt Rachel, valise-laden, out of the room.

"Bring the candle," said that lady, and they walked on downstairs.

When they had got about half.way, Tryphena stopped short. I do not suppose this fact would have been thought worthy of attention had she not likewise carried the light.

As it was, Miss Fowke turned and gazed at her, questioningly.

"I cannot," smiled she, shaking her head, "it is no use!"

For a while Aunt Rachel considered her, as though she fancied it just possible that a certain amount of method might regulate her madness; then, however, recalled to a sense of reality by the striking of the clock, which seized this opportunity of informing all who cared to listen, that the post-meridianal day had attained the respectable age of eight hours, she exclaimed:

"Nonsense, don't be so selfish!"

"Is it selfish?" sighed Phenie, meekly, accomplishing one more step; "I care more for his disappointment than my own."

"Then," rejoined Aunt Rachel, "you should do all you can to cheer him up, and make it seem lighter. Remember, 'sorrow shared is almost pleasure;' you were taught that in one of the hymns you used to say when you were quite a little child, and desperate work I had to get you to learn 'em, too. Never was there such an obstinate young Turk."

This by way of encouragement and consolation.

Tryphena, her eyes bent on the gray flagged

floor, dragged herself on through the hall, for Robert was coming, and she had not the heart to look at him.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Aunt Rachel, as he appeared in the passage, "I hope you've changed your mind, that you mean to wait till the morning, and see how things seem then. There's never any use in being in too great a hurry."

"The hurry is not of my making," rejoined he, soberly; "you forget," with a slightly bitter inflection, "I am under marching orders."

Miss Fowke heaved a liberal sigh.

"Where is he?" questioned she, shortly, "is he asleep?"

"Yes," smiled Robert, "sound; otherwise I should not have ventured to look for you. It is very bad, my Fay, isn't it?" advancing towards Tryphena, who stood some way back, by the hall table, staring dully at the flickering flame of the draught-scourged candle.

Fay was a little name that he had found for her that afternoon, hidden midst those bright phantasies—those skilfully-twined word gar-

lands wherewith lovers do so timeously delight to deck the minds of their enchantresses—garlands whereof the perfume lingers when the flowers are dead, which withered have a price. She would be, he had declared, his good Fay always—always—his Fairy Queen, the radiant ruler of his hopes, his days, and now——

In silence she looked up at him—in silence, stonily.

"But," pursued he, noting her changed aspect—changed as is that of the summer earth when a cloud sails athwart the sun—"we will not despair, dear," putting an arm about her, and drawing her close to him; "your father may, if we are true to each other and wait patiently, give us his consent after all, and I am sure Aunt Rachel will do whatever she can to help us; only we must be true, my darling—quite unalterably true!"

"Yes," said Tryphena, "we must be true."

"And that you can promise me," he went on, smoothing back the soft dark hair from her broad, fair forehead, and kissing her gently between the eyes—eyes dry and wide open, and hot as though gazing upon flame—

"you will never let any one persuade you to think otherwise of me than you do now. I say persuade, because I do not believe that of your own free will you ever would."

Tryphena smiled, and leant her head against his shoulder.

"No," rejoined she again, "I do not think I ever could."

Then they turned silent, neither did they move, standing there heart to heart, cheek to cheek, as might two figures painted on a wall.

Suddenly, however, a shrill neigh rang out upon the tranquil air.

Robert started.

"Poor Silvertail!" said he, "I had quite forgotten him. He was so surprised when he saw me with the saddle. You will let me write to you, Phenie, won't you, and you will write to me?" framing her face in his two hands—so cold a face and white to deathliness. "There can be no harm in that, for remember we are as good as man and wife, my dear! I am yours and you are mine. No power can part us really except death!"

"And," said she smiling, "even that cannot, for I have died and still do I cleave to you.

Oh, Robert!" wrenching herself away from him and covering her face with her hands, and breaking forth into the most piteous lamentation, "what have we done that we should be so tormented? Have I not striven year after year to be better, to do what good I could, and do not you——"

"Child," interposed Robert, gravely, "you speak foolishly! We suffer, why we know not; so does every living thing in earth and sea and air. But time flies. Kiss me, my sweet, and bid me trust and hope. What, not a little kiss to make much of as I ride along? Fay!"

"I cannot," sobbed the girl, passionately, "every word you say cuts into my heart like a knife; the very sound of your voice tortures me, for it is my best music, and soon it will have ceased for ever. We shall never see each other again, Robert—never! You don't know father. You fancy he will change, that he will tire of being unkind; but——"

"Tryphena," smiled Robert, laying his hands upon her shoulders, weightily, "in a year, if you will only be patient, and love me, you shall reign at Kirton."

But she shook her head.

"It is not reigning," said she, dolorously, "that I care about. It is being with you."

Here a subdued cough arrested their attention, and Robert, looking round, became aware that Aunt Rachel, solemn of visage, red of eyes, was gazing at them intently from afar.

"I do not wish to seem prying," observed she, coming forward, "and I'm sorry to disturb you; but I'm afraid he'll break loose."

"Do you mean Silvertail?" inquired Robert, a little dubious as to the identity of the insurgent.

"Yes," she replied, "I've given him an apple and a bit of bread, but he won't be pacified, he's so eager to be off."

"Very well," said Robert, "I'll come," and therewith turned to follow her.

He would, he thought, bid Phenie goodbye the last thing of all—there was no good to be got by hurting the poor thing more than was unavoidable.

And Phenie made no attempt to stay his departure. He willed to go, and go he must. There was no help for it: who was she to add

to his perplexities? Soon she would be dead—dead and buried, and forgotten; a little more pain, or a little less—what matter? With a sigh, she too walked on down the passage, slowly, being tired.

"Wo—wo!" cried Aunt Rachel, from the outer door, as Robert re-entered the kitchen, his eyes fixed on Mr. Fowke's recumbent form, the facial graces of that worthy gentleman being temporarily obscured by a crimson pocket-handkerchief, a conviction lurking in his mind—due, perhaps, to the sickly odour of rum, mingled with tobacco, which pervaded the atmosphere—that never before, what with insufficient light, the uncorked spirit bottle, used tumbler, emptied pipe, and ash-strewn hearth, had he so plainly distinguished the mean ugliness and even squalor of Tryphena's surroundings. "Whatever shall we do if he breaks the bridle?"

"Mend it, I suppose," was the composed rejoinder, given whilst assuming a certain furred brown riding-coat; "or substitute a halter. Thank you, dear. I wonder how long it will be before you will find my gloves for

me again? Nay, you must not cry. We shall be happy yet, my child!"

"I declare," exclaimed Aunt Rachel, fairly wrought to desperation by the misfortunes and meekness under trial of these two poor young people—he stroking her cheek and smiling down on her so tenderly, and she so white and pitiful—"it's enough to drive one clean demented. Jacob!" darting at the handkerchief heretofore mentioned, snatching it off, and flinging it to the other end of the room, where it alighted on Beauty in folds alike picturesque, and calculated to promote warmth, "just rouse up, will you?"

But Mr. Fowke had journeyed too far into dreamland to be overtaken and brought back thus rapidly. He merely groaned and turned, or rather tried to turn, upon his side.

Aunt Rachel, however, if vigorous in attack was no less steady in pursuit.

"Rouse up!" reiterated she, catching hold of his shoulder, and shaking him with all her might, "Mr. Valoynes is going."

"Oh, but," exclaimed Tryphena, perturbedly, "he will be so angry. You will do no good by waking him."

"I can do no harm at all events," was the prompt retort, "for things are just as bad as ever they can be, and it's your last chance. Rouse up!" with a ferocious tug at his collar.

"No," muttered Jacob, in his sleep—moving uneasily—and putting up his hand to his throat; "not yet, and I won't wear that cap; take it away. Oh!" starting and opening his eyes, and struggling up into a sitting position, "I thought I was being hung. Phoo!" brushing back his hair, thick hair and curly, and sparsely streaked with gray—"my forehead's all a muck o' sweat."

"No wonder!" said Aunt Rachel, sternly, regarding him with grimmest disapprobation; "you won't be able to sleep in your bed soon if you don't mend your ways. Here's Mr. Valoynes waiting to bid you good-night."

"What?" exclaimed Jacob, twisting himself round, and stamping his feet upon the floor, "you're still here? Be off this instant. Do you want me to throw you out of that door with my own hands?"

Robert shrugged his shoulders.

"You see," said he to Aunt Rachel, "Tryphena was right. Interference is useless."

"Ay," observed Jacob, "interference is useless, when I'm the one interfered with. Neither will I allow it. You take yourself back to your Kirton, your Westmoreland—wherever you choose—so long as you don't infest my place any longer. And as for you"—turning to Tryphena, who stood by her sweetheart, lips apart, hands clasped, eyes big with fright—"you say another word to this fellow, and I'll soon show you whether I'm to be trifled with!"

But terrified though the girl was and unhappy, she had not quite lost her wits—was not quite spiritless. We have all heard how a hen will, in defence of her chicks, fly at a cat, a dog—nay, Sieur Rénard himself; how a she-goat will face a tiger sooner than surrender her prized kid. Even so Tryphena. Moreover, was she not a Fowke?

"It is nonsense to talk like that, father," replied she quietly. "Robert"—laying her hand upon his arm—"loves me and I love him, and we hope some day to be married. There is nothing to be said either against his character or circumstances, and I am eighteen: you cannot treat me quite like a baby!"

"Can't I?" retorted Jacob, waxing red with passion, "then I will treat you as a brazen hussy, who is a disgrace to her father's house. Do you think I am to be bearded under my own roof? Go to your room. And you, sir," addressing Robert, "take the road with what speed you may, and let me never see your hateful face again!"

"Good-bye," said Robert, offering his hand to Aunt Rachel, who stood apart weeping fit to break her heart, but she only shook her head, her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, and seizing it blindly, carried it to her lips; she had no breath for speech.

"And good-bye, my darling!" kissing Tryphena hard upon the mouth, "I will come back, if I live. Mind that!" addressing Mr. Fowke as might an imperial monarch address a rebel people—"I will come back!"

"All right," laughed Jacob, "come; I'll be ready for ye."

A rush of frosty air, a glimpse of bland bright moon, keen stars, the neigh of a tethered horse, the click of a garden gate, and he was gone—gone out into the night, the night whence he had come, the mute, unknown, illimitable night.

"Oh dear," exclaimed Aunt Rachel, as her dulled ears—dulled with the thick noise of quickened pulses—caught the small sounds of Silvertail's receding hoofs, "to think that I should ever have lived to go through such an evening as this!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Fowke; "'tis something to grieve over, sure*ly*!" and laughed low and bitterly.

And Tryphena?

Tryphena smiled.

CHAPTER XII.

AND NOW THE TIME WAS WINTERLY.

WHEN Miss Fowke, junior, woke on Friday morning, which feat she accomplished considerably later than usual, in company with a headache and a sore throat, for oh, degrading fact, this miserable young woman had, in defiance of sentiment, prosaically caught cold during her protracted ramble of the preceding afternoon, her eyes—poor weak little eyes, scarce visible between their swollen lids—were made to blink and smart by the azure brilliance of a sky, cloudless, pleasurable as though 'twere June. Indeed, lying there, her hands clasped above her head, the girl thought that she might very well have slept away four months

instead of as many hours, that a green world should of a surety wed with so gay a heaven; so thought till she got up and looked abroad, that is, then fancy fled shivering. On every leaf, the ground, the garden gate, the walls, hung brightest filagree—filagree wrought by frost.

Yes, the fine weather had set in at last, set in just in time to render the roads good for travelling, to cheer sad travellers, particularly travellers who journeyed north, to the land of snow and mist, of cakes and ale, and stout true hearts and joviality. How fortunate! Yet did the fashion of Tryphena's mouth wax woful as she gazed. There are times when the exceeding fitness of things hurts worse than disaster, even as forced civility.

Her dressing done—dressing sadly wearisome—no one would look twice at her now—her dream was over; again did she stand as she had stood any time these eighteen years, a small lone creature, one with whom sorrow was more plentiful than joy, who laboured far oftener than she played, whose best wisdom it would be seemingly to get her to the grave;—her dressing done, I repeat,

she knelt down and said her prayers, then issued forth into the corridor a little paler than usual and heavy eyed, otherwise her ordinary self.

It was her nature to grieve patiently.

As she turned towards the stairs Aunt Rachel met her sight.

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed that lady, in a tone which might be held indicative of relief, did one not know how averse she was to the harbouring of idle fears, or to be quite exact, any fears whatever; "I thought I had better come and see what you were about, as it was getting late. How do you feel?"

"I have got a sore throat," replied Tryphena, "and my head aches. I shall be glad of a cup of tea."

"Poor thing!" said Aunt Rachel, "I dare say you will. Your father's had his breakfast, but the teapot is still hot. I stood it on the hearth on purpose."

"Is he downstairs, then?" questioned the girl, anxiously.

"No; he's gone out. That was what kept me. I should have been up before, only I

knew you wouldn't care to meet him sooner than you could help."

"Does he seem very cross?"

"No," replied Miss Fowke, raising her eyebrows and pursing up her lips—"no—he don't seem much inclined for talk, but that's nothing new. Come along, though. I've got lots to do to-day. It's Friday, and Mr. Valoynes' portmanteau should be packed this morning by rights. I don't like things to lie about; some might get mislaid, and there'd be a pretty set out. Perhaps, however, you'll see to that?"—this going downstairs.

But Tryphena shook her head.

"Dear, dear!" ejaculated Aunt Rachel, aggrievedly, "why, I thought it was just the very thing to please you. But there, you beat me entirely—screeching with laughter one minute and crying your eyes out the next, and not hysterical either!" and on she hastened to the kitchen.

Tryphena followed at her leisure. She was not idly disposed, but this morning she felt as though, had her life depended on it, she could not have run a hundred yards.

"You don't seem to make much way with

your breakfast," observed Miss Fowke presently, bustling in from the garden, her arms full of firewood, her eyes bent on the breakfast table. It was all very well to show feeling; but there was no use in encouraging young people to think too much of themselves. Every one must know the feel of the iron shoe sooner or later—the sooner the better, looking at life as it was, and not as it was made out to be by poets and painters and light-minded people generally. Besides, 'twas nearly ten.

"I am not hungry," answered the girl, dully; "I should like to go back to bed, and sleep for hours and hours!"

"Better by half take a good walk," was the brisk rejoinder, supplemented by the cracking and hissing of sticks in torture. "I wonder who's to keep a hearth alight with these things; and I've asked your father till I'm sick to let Tapp cut some more logs. By-the-way, that would just be a nice job for you. You step down to Martha, and say I must have some by to-night. No heing or sheing—I must have 'em."

"Very well," said Phenie, emptying her teacup.

"But," added Aunt Rachel, "you're not to chatter. You can stay and have a bit of talk, but no gossiping; mind now."

"Very well," said the girl again, and rose to her feet.

"It's for your own sake I say it," pursued Miss Fowke, picking up a live ember and tossing it into the fire, as unconcernedly as though her fingers were made of cast-iron; "not that Martha would make mischief, but others might, and scandals, like snowballs, get big by rolling."

"You need not be afraid," smiled Phenie, dryly, and having tied on her bonnet and cloak, forthwith walked to the door, lifted the latch, and went out, Beauty following her. Much sympathy lay hid between these two.

Now, in a general way, her bonds loosened for a space, to indulge in gay talk—talk addressed to nobody in particular, adapted to the understanding of birds and beasts impartially—to sing, to take little runs, to be, in fact, childlike, unartificial, and herself, was for Tryphena purest happiness; and specially did she delight thus to flout propriety on fine

mornings—mornings such as this, for instance, when you could see the sheep feeding on the downs distant three miles, when the tinkle-tinkle of their bells rang pleasant as chimes heard of a summer's eve from thyme-scented hill or river's breast, when the whole earth made merry—so merry that you could not help but be merry, too, just for company—even if you had no particular cause for mirth personally, if you were indeed a little tired and worn, a drudge, and dear to nobody. But to-day no word, gay or sad, wise or foolish, found its way out of those bright lips—bright still, though strait—no gentle hand-touch gladdened a poor dog's heart, and the poor dog could not understand it, looked up at the sweet face she loved, stood still, and whined questioningly.

"Well," smiled Tryphena, perceiving her friend's uneasiness, "what's the matter? One can't be a hypocrite always!"

Whereat the friend barked, leapt, gave way to such extravagance of gesture, that a dejected-looking donkey who was watching them over the hedge of an adjacent field, brayed loud with envy; for what a fine thing it would

be surely to have a smooth brown-and-white skin and drooping ears, and a taper tail, and be permitted to frisk round beautiful young women, instead of having to drag a coal-cart and be cudgelled and growled at, and at last, when one could work no longer, turned out to starve.

John Tapp's cottage was situated midway between the Grange and the village, at the end of a lane which, though long, had no turning, neither led anywhere, terminating in a ragged patch of unenclosed land, similar in character to the Tumps, and on which roamed in placid majesty certain cocks, hens, ducks, and a black pig—the objects of care, affection, and interest well-nigh parental.

Regarded from a pictorial point of view, Mr. Tapp's family residence had its merits. Nay, aided by cloud shadows, a bit of red in the garden, a gleam of sunshine on the yellow wall, and the beautifying proximity of the huge horse-chestnut which in summer spread green and flowerful over the little washhouse to the right, it afforded opportunities for breadth of treatment, and the happy management of light and shade, which must—we

being, of course, artistic in our tastes, and lost in mute admiration of Nature under all her aspects (even as a black pig nosing a manure heap) force us to regard it as "the most lovely little dot of a place ever dreamt of, all roses and clematis and strawberries, and syllabub and simplicity. Quite a gem!" Certainly.

Lived in, however, from one year's end to another, when sick, when well, when hot, when cold, this "gem" and "lovely little dot" somewhat fell off in attraction. Stonecrop is a pretty plant, and comes in nicely on thatch, but it will not keep out rain. Windows which, measured, give a return of fifteen inches by thirty—though unique and delightful when dyed crimson by the last ruddy rays of a sun declining through cobalt mixed with lake to gamboge, or peeping through greenery by the help of judiciously-used body-colour, are scarcely qualified to transmit either light or air with that freedom on which dull persons, persons dead to chromatic influence, are wont to assert depends, not merely human convenience, but health. A worm-eaten old door swinging on rusty hinges looks well on

tinted paper, practically it is conducive to rheumatism and toothache. Between ourselves, John used to wonder when strangers (the ladies who visited at the Vicarage when the vicar was alive) congratulated him on his good fortune in being the possessor of such a home.

"I can't make it out," said he one day, when a bevy of these fair creatures (the late pastor at Shobdon was a cousin of my Lord Chiffonier, who had the living in his gift, and much thought of by the county) had fluttered off up the lane, twittering rapturously anent the fascinations of certain tortoiseshell kittens which they had honoured with their inspection. "What they do mean by it puzzles me. A sweet place—a perfect pictur'," clasping his hands on the handle of his spade, and eying that same critically, "I see nowt o' its sweetness, nor yet its perfection. I only see thet 'tis a miracle 'ow it do 'old together!"

"Lor!" retorted Martha, who was standing beneath the vine-clad porch, her yellow sunbonnet tilted over her nose (it was July), her hands on her hips, "what do thet matter? 'Tis good enough for the like o' we. We do

live in it, and they do look at us, and it do please 'em—just like we're pleased wi' lookin' at the wax figures at the fair; for the wax figures is fine and we're plain, and we're plain and the ladies they be fine. 'Tain't nothin' more nor a nat'ral likin' for variety," with a bitter little laugh. Martha had her opinions.

Still, despite their sense of its defects, and innate though silent conviction that it behoved the "maister," if only to preserve his character as a landlord from criticism alike untrammelled and unfavourable, to take steps for their removal—a conviction which increased in bulk from year to year, widening with every crack, lengthening with every crevice—the Tapps were fond of their cottage. It was tumble-down and draught-riddled, and the bedroom floors were "that rotten," averred Tom, "that it was as much as you dared do to turn in bed;" but mother died there, Tom himself had "growed up" there; even Martha—practical, hard-working Martha—had memories in connection with the seat under the tree, the porch, the chimney-corner, which she would be loath to deal roughly by.

"'Twas at that gate," said she one day, when

reckoning up with Tryphena the reasons for and against change, "that poor Will took my 'and in 'is—we weer standin' theer together; 'e'd brought faythei a bunch of spring onions for 'is supper, and I were biddin' 'im good-night—and said, smilin' (there was never nobody 'ad such a smile as 'im), 'Patty, I do want you for my wife;' and 'twas up that road I watched 'im go, with the ribbons a-flyin' in 'is cap, when 'e went for to seek 'is death. And of a summer's night, when it's all quite quiet, I do step out into the garden, and it do seem to me that 'e's everywheer; and then mebbe I cry a bit, and that does me good, and the time as I must wait afore I shall set eyes on 'im again don't seem near so long, nor the waitin' 'alf so tedious. No; I don't think 'twill do for us to move, if so be as we can contrive to keep on as we are, and that worst 'ole's seen to afore we get the frost."

And Tryphena kissed her friend, and made answer cheerfully:

"That is right, Martha, dear; I should not like any one to live here but you: it would be like a bad dream. And some day, you know, when I am twenty-one, and can do as

I please, it shall all be made quite nice, quite beautiful; and I will have a little room built on to the wall like a swallow's nest, so that I can come and stay when I am tired of being at home. I do get a little tired sometimes. But I shall not fly away when the summer is over—winter and summer you will always be loved by me."

And Martha smiled, and stroked the child's soft hair—for this all happened long ago, when Phenie was but twelve years of age—a slight, pale, spiritual-faced creature, delicate as a harebell, swayed by every passing emotion as that meek blossom by errant breezes.

But constant as Tryphena had ever been in her attachment to her earliest admirer, or rather admirers—it being an article of faith with the Tapp family, and even test of moral force, that "no sweeter countenance than hers could be seen under the sun"—and deep as was the satisfaction she derived from Martha's society, to-day she seemed a little less than eager to reach the familiar gate, with its one new bar and four old ones—somewhat inclined to dawdle, to let Beauty run on ahead and skim the cream of welcome.

Still, let travelling feet be swift or leaden, journeys must end sooner or later, purpose remaining strong. Wherefore, by the time Chummy had made his bow, and displayed that solicitude for the bodily well-being of his betters which is so sure an indication of a well-balanced mind, our loiterer had accomplished the first half of her pilgrimage, and stood well within hail of friendship—had friendship cared to hail.

But not a soul was visible.

Now, there were occasions when Martha, in view of that tremendous contingency, quarter-day, likewise pressing private necessities connected with the feet, the head, and other portions of the human frame, especially designed, it would seem, as sources of income, and means for imparting impetus to the sartorial imagination, would lock up the house and absent herself for hours together, alleging on her return that she had been to market, or seeing what she could do with them stockings or that lace, to the manufacture of which she had devoted her spare time for nobody knew how long. True, this did not happen often; besides, it was only last Saturday that she

was at Coatham. Misfortunes never came single though, and if you did chance to——

"Lor, Miss Phenie," exclaimed the origin of these sour reflections, suddenly issuing from the washhouse, her apron gathered up bag-wise in both hands—"wheerever do you spring from? I didn't 'ear you a-comin'!"

"How should you?" smiled Phenie, languidly; "I don't make as much noise when I walk as a troop of horsemen."

"No," said Martha, shading her eyes with her hand—the girl's face struck her as unfamiliar, despite its familiarity—"but Beauty barks so in a general way. Wheer is she?"

"Somewhere about," was the indifferent answer. "Aunt wants some logs."

"Indeed!" said Martha, looking down at the contents of her apron. "Poor thing, then, poor thing!"

"What is it?" inquired Tryphena, advancing a few steps, smitten of curiosity. "Oh, dear, I am so tired!"

"Be you?" rejoined Martha; "I thought you looked very white. It's one o' the young chicken which 'as got stepped on. The old

'en's so dreadful fussy, cluckin' and trampin' about. She'll be the death of all of 'em, if we don't take care."

"She is too fond of them," observed Tryphena, dryly; "it does not do to love anything or any one very much."

"Bless me!" laughed Martha, "that's a desperate wise notion for you to 'ave got 'old of."

Tryphena smiled.

"We're all wise at times," replied she; "when we're unhappy, I think, mostly. Don't you know, Aunt Rachel declares that nothing strengthens the eyesight like crying."

"Yes," said Martha, "your aunt's got queer sayin's at times. But don't be so dowly. I want to 'ear about the weddin'."

Tryphena shook her head.

"What's that for?" questioned Martha, after a brief pause, considering her judicially.

"It is all over," she answered; "he went away last night;" but her lips quivered as she spoke, and her voice faltered, for it hurt her to say thus much.

"Went away last night!" echoed Martha, relaxing her hold on her apron in her astonish-

ment; "well, did one ever! Be quiet, you little misery." This to the chicken, who was fluttering and chirping with affecting vehemence, being alarmed for its personal safety. "Tom declared that 'e met Mr. Valoynes as 'e came back last night from Chadlington, but I wouldn't believe 'im. I said 'e'd been makin' too free with Farmer Beer's cider."

"Ah," said Tryphena, "that's just like you. Poor Tom! He saw right enough."

"Well, but," pursued Martha, argumentatively, "whatever is the meanin' of it? 'Ow did it come about? I'm downright confounded!"

"If I may come in," was the weary rejoinder, "I will tell you. I cannot talk out here. I feel as if I should drop."

In silence Martha faced round, and led the way to the cottage. She was, as she had said, confounded.

"Theer!" observed she, when they had gained the not too spacious but scrupulously clean kitchen which served her and her father and brother for living room, pulling forward John's chair—a roomy, high-backed chair, furnished with a crimson cushion, the chair in

which he, worthy soul, had dozed of Sunday afternoons for something like a quarter of a century—"you sit yourself down a bit. I don't wonder that you feel weak, poor child. Poor lamb!" And—the chicken having regained undisputed control of its actions—pressed Phenie's head, sun-bonnet and all, against her bosom, patting it gently the while, as will a nurse pat the head of a fractious infant.

"Don't," whispered the girl, "you will make me cry, and my eyes are so sore. Besides, it does no good. I must bear it. Everything that lives has to suffer. Everything in earth, and air, and sea," smiling a little over her borrowed wisdom.

"Yes," said Martha, letting go of her, "that is true. Still sufferin's sufferin', and I don't see any need for you two to be made miserable; but I suppose 'twas the maister!" somewhat bitterly.

"I do not think father would have said anything of his own accord," replied Tryphena, fingering the strings of her great cloak, rolling them up tape fashion, converting them into corkscrew ringlets, "but you

know he (Mr. Valoynes, I mean) had—had——"

"Asked you to marry him, I suppose?" interposed Martha.

"Yes. That was on Wednesday; and last night, when we were upstairs seeing to the linen, he told father, and then—then—oh, I don't know. It was dreadful!"

"Ah!" said Martha, expressively, and stared hard at the fire. She could well dispense with details of that scene. Mr. Fowke was, as you know, no favourite of hers.

"Well," observed she at length, sighing, and turning to the window, "'tis a thousand pities; but I can't say as I'm altogether surprised, though you did startle me just at first. Some'ow I never thought them two fancied each other. They was mighty civil, and all that, and any one as didn't know the maister might 'ave been deceived, but"—shaking her head—"I shan't forget 'is manner the night 'e come 'ome and 'eard what your aunt 'ad done, about 'er 'avin' took 'im in. Don't you recollect?"

"Yes," said Phenie; "but then that was before they got acquainted. Since Robert has

been back from Devonshire it has all been so different. 'Twas that, I think, partly, which made me say 'Yes.'"

"Dear me," said Martha, "you do be dutiful!" and lapsed into silence, her arms folded, her eyes fixed on a bed of cabbages, among which frolicked the two dogs—she was standing before the window—being full of thought.

A perspicuous young woman was Martha.

"And what about the minister?" remarked she, presently; "what do 'e say to all of it?"

Tryphena looked up. She was sitting with her head on her hand, for it ached—that poor head,—looked up stupidly.

"How do you mean?" said she; "I don't understand."

"Why, 'twill be 'is turn next," with a queer smile.

"His turn," echoed the girl, flushing crimson; "you are very unkind!"

"I'm sorry for that," rejoined Miss Tapp, calmly; "sech is not my wish, neither my intention, but I can't help seein' what's str'ight in front of me. And I tell you what, Miss Tryphena"—turning short round and striking

one hand on the palm of the other—"that's a bad man. 'E may call 'imself a servant of the Most 'Igh, or a follower of the Lord Jesus, or what 'e likes, but 'e's a bad man, and I've reason for what I'm sayin'!"

"Martha!" said Tryphena, her face quite pale again, like to the face of sculptured seraphim on cloistered wall, "you frighten me; and please don't frighten me, for I am very miserable."

"My dear," returned Martha, coming towards her, her homely features made quite beautiful by tenderness, "I would not frighten you for the world, but to see you that man's prey would drive me wild. Miss Phenie, you are a young lady. Yes, you are, as true a lady as ever was born, and you don't know what it is 'e means. Mr. Valoynes is a man, and 'as got a man's feelin's, but that's different. The other's a nasty black-'earted scoundrel. Why, there was a time when 'e'd 'ave sat 'ere 'ole afternoons, if I'd 'ave let 'im; but Lord bless you, my Will ain't so easy forgot. That don't matter, though; that's neither 'ere nor there. It's 'is slow, bad, cruel, longin's that I wants to see disapp'inted!"

"But," argued Tryphena, "I do not think that he is the least slow, or bad, or cruel. I think——"

"Marry 'im then!" exclaimed Martha in a fury; "marry 'im—and——"

"Hush!" commanded Tryphena, rising to her feet with dignity quite regal, suggestive of coronation robes and a jewelled sceptre—"you have said quite enough."

"Ah," returned Martha, standing her ground grandly, "that may be! But I've got a 'ead on my shoulders, and I know that if you don't stick tight to 'im 'oo loves you and 'oom you love, you'll never 'ave a day's 'appiness all your life long. And you won't"—dolorously—"'twill be 'Fayther bids me do this, and aunt bids me do t'other,' and 'twixt the two of 'em——"

"Nothing of the sort," interposed the girl, hotly; "you talk nonsense. If you can keep true to your Will——"

But words failed her; her voice sank to a whisper.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Martha, flinging out her arms, and snatching this very imperious and weak young person to her bosom, there to

sob and moan incontinent; "don't let's argify no more, for pity's sake. I'm sure your sorrow's as my own, and worse, for to see you cry, theer, I'd rather be 'ung, I weer a-goin' to say, only that do seem too strong; but I do 'ate that man, and theer's an end on't: sneakin' about wi' his cloak down to 'is 'eels and 'is 'at over 'is eyes! Promise me"—suddenly taking Tryphena by the shoulders, and holding her away by main force—"that you'll never go from your plighted word."

"My dear Martha," smiled Tryphena, despite of, and through her tears, "do you know that you are talking quite wildly—quite like a person in a fever?"

And Martha laughed and wiped her eyes, and daresayed she was, "'twas enough to make 'er." And then with one more kiss they bade each other good-bye—being only common people, to whom time was precious.

CHAPTER XIII.

AND WHERE THE RED WAS, LO, THE BLOODLESS WHITE.

SATURDAY passed and Sunday came quite in their ordinary manner, Miss Fowke continuing to display her natural gifts with a liberality nothing short of munificent, Tryphena performing each and all of her humble duties with her normal alacrity, her face as unclouded, her demeanour as serene, as though she had not a care in the world. "For," said she, "bravery does not consist in capering when the wind sets dead against one, but walking steadily on in the teeth of it."

Concerning the complexion assumed by her

conduct when viewed from a position alike superior and parental, this philosophic young woman was able to ascertain nothing, either by comparison or the growth of facts.

Jacob hardly opened his lips throughout Friday, and spent Saturday at Chadlington, it being market day at that thriving and enlightened borough.

On Sunday afternoon Mr. Latchet enjoyed the privilege of revealing the intentions of the Almighty and the glories of heaven, with quite remarkable lucidity and happiness of expression, to a larger congregation than usual, it being the first appearance of the new stove, long an object of curiosity and desire, the tendency of the human frame to suffer from a low rate of temperature, despite warmth of conviction, and, as Martha would phrase it, "a nat'ral likin' for variety," contributing in about equal degrees to the rise and flow of these emotions.

Aunt Rachel and Tryphena were, of course, visible in their accustomed places; the former prominently so, having during the previous week received back a black satin bonnet lately sent to Mrs. Baker, the milliner and high

priestess of fashion in Coatham, to be turned and garnished with coquelicot ribbon, which head-piece, being reserved for Sabbatical use, made much show among the faded straws of the less fortunate hearers of the Word at Shobdon, particularly during the hymns, when it wagged itself to and fro, strictly out of time (no Fowke ever had an ear for music; Tryphena could turn a tune prettily enough, it was true, but she got that from her mother, along with her fair skin), and reared itself roofwards after a manner past picturing. The blessing given, and the minister on his feet again, a general move took place in the direction of the blackened cylinder gracing the centre of the barn.

"Open the door," said Mrs. Kipps—a lady of an inquiring and energetic turn of mind—elbowing her way through the throng, "an' let's 'ave a peep at 'is inside."

"Take care," said Miss Fowke, ribbons on end, "you'll set the place on fire, and then we shall all be burnt alive. Stand back, children," —laying violent hands on two small creatures, male and female, who were strenuously endeavouring to insert their two small noses between

Mrs. Kipps and Mr. Tapp with but indifferent success—John, like all the rest of the world, must "go to meetin' this afternoon"—"do you know where you are?"

"Protean nature," smiled the minister, quitting his desk; "ever changing, never changed. In Athens, in Shobdon, beneath *cheiton* and smock-frock, love of novelty inextinguishable. But," suddenly altering his tone, "it is really a great improvement. I like it better than the one we have at Coatham!"

"Indeed," said Aunt Rachel; and therewith began to discuss prices, consuming force, durability, with the keen interest bred of proprietorship. It was to her that the faithful of that region were secondarily indebted for this latest aid to godliness.

"Mr. Fowke," observed Acts at length, when the enthralling topic had waxed a little threadbare, and the congregation, filled with awe and admiration (Peter Batt going so far as to pronounce the thing "owdacious"), had gradually dispersed, "has not ventured out this bitter afternoon"—it was still freezing

hard; "I trust that indisposition is not the cause of his absence?"

"Well," replied Aunt Rachel, "he's not very first rate. He has got a touch of rheumatism or lumbago—I don't know quite which it is; but it affects his back, so I think it must be lumbago."

"Really!" said Acts, "I am sorry to hear that. Does he know how he caught it?"

"No," she answered; "that's what's so odd. Myself—I put it down to cold; the weather's so changeable."

"Yes," rejoined the minister, "it is!" and paused. "And Mr. Valoynes," added he at length, looking round and smiling blandly at Tryphena, who stood a little way off, her eyes bent on the ground, her face grave and preoccupied—"what of him?"

Aunt Rachel shook her head.

"Mr. Valoynes left us on Thursday evening," she replied.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Acts, in a tone of unfeigned surprise.

"Ah!" was the meaningful rejoinder, "'tis dear me. Will you come home with us?"

For a moment or two he made her no-

answer, seeming lost in thought; then he said hurriedly, putting out his hand:

"No, thank you; I must go and see poor Clara Bond. By the way, Miss Tryphena, if you can spare the time, I wish you would look in there some day. She would be so pleased to see you, and she cannot last long."

"I will go," replied the girl quietly.

"Thank you!" said he again; "that's very good of you, and"—possessing himself of her gloved fingers and pressing them tenderly—"believe me, I am indeed grieved that anything should have occurred to—to cloud your happiness."

But she held her peace: evinced not the slightest gratitude for his sympathy.

"Really!" observed Miss Fowke, as having concluded their farewells they set their faces Grangewards, "you get to be quite affected, hanging your head, and not seeming to hear when folks speak to you."

When informed that the minister had expressed solicitude concerning his bodily condition, Mr. Fowke merely grunted, and caused the toe of his right boot to perform the office of a poker. It was thought in certain

quarters that he might well have shown more feeling—might have said, "I'm much obliged, I'm sure!" but this conviction travelled not beyond the domain of silence, ample means for effective utterance otherwise than verbal being provided by the legs of chairs, the lids of teapots, and last, but not least, the movements of the human body.

On crawled the wingless hours, noon dogged the heels of morning, night chased light-fingered noon; and as time sped, old Isaac, Isaac the postman, acquired a prominence of position and clearness of outline in the mental foreground of one young person, which, made known to that worthy man, might well have excused any sudden extravagance of gesture, or exuberance of fancy on his part—might have even set him dancing, letter-bag in hand, on the king's high road, without giving rise to grave scandal. For three days had elapsed —three whole days—and Robert had not written.

"It is very strange," observed Aunt Rachel, as twelve o'clock, a.m., struck on Tuesday, and with each succeeding "ting" hope dwindled; "I did really think we should have heard from him this morning."

"Yes," said Tryphena, turning away from the window, and plucking a dead leaf from off a lemon verbena plant which stood in a pot on the round table.

"You see," pursued Miss Fowke, "there's his portmanteau. That ought to be sent off. As I have often said, I'd rather not have the charge of other people's property. Besides——"

"Yes," said Tryphena, again.

"But men are so careless. Get out, dog!" —this to Beauty, who cumbered the hearth; "I do believe she misses him, for when I came down on Friday morning she walked straight up to me and made the hideousest noise. It might have been cramp, to be sure."

"Dear Beauty!" smiled Phenie, putting out her hand.

Whereat the old dog stretched herself and yawned, and then came and laid her head on the girl's lap—nay, got up on her hind legs, and licked her cheek; and the girl bent down her face, and hid her eyes on the old dog's shoulder, and when she looked up, that old dog's coat was wet. To have loved him so, and to be forgotten in less than a week. Was it not indeed just a little grievous?

"Perhaps," thought Tryphena miserably, "now that he has breathed fresh air, so to speak, he has found out how great has been his mistake, and does not like to write, because he is puzzled what to say. He would always be straightforward, cruel perhaps, but always straightforward."

You see she could never cease to think it wonderful that he deemed her worth caring for, never, though she were his wife a hundred times over. No humility so humble as that inspired by strong affection.

But not being an exalted personage, or one bereft of reason, I find that it is somewhat difficult to give full vent to woe, to sit entirely apart, eyes streaming, ears closed to all sounds save those of lamentation, however genuine the source of your affliction, however indubitable your claims on the long-suffering and pity of your fellow-creatures. I find, indeed, that to rouse up, to be active, serviceable, and even occasionally gay, is rather the line of conduct prescribed by Public Opinion, most eminent of physicians, as peculiarly suited to anguished souls—souls sick with doubt, loneliness, longing for a sight of that

whereon none shall look any more, henceforth for ever. Thus, enlarged as were Phenie's sorrows in these first days of trial, and fervently as she might deplore the depth of her desolation under the cover of darkness and a patchwork counterpane, during fifteen hours out of each twenty-four, no change was perceptible either in her looks or behaviour, save that, if possible, she was a little more eager to do all that could be required of her than heretofore, and this specially after post-time on Wednesday. It was as though hope then being quite exhausted, she desired to bury her one great terrible memory beneath a heap of little ones, little smooth fragments of recollection, shining as valueless; this being a woman.

Aunt Rachel, as was only to be expected, saw nothing in the least surprising in her niece's fortitude.

"She bears up well, I allow," said she to Mr. Fowke on Thursday morning, as they sat together at breakfast, Tryphena having been despatched to the rick-barten with a message for John relative to the carting of some straw—"but that's not to be wondered at. She has

not been brought up to give way to nonsense, and raise the place, just because she can't have everything according to her own liking; still, she certainly is very black under the eyes; and while one side of her face is quite pale, the other will be as red as red. Holding your tongue's not everything."

"Give her some physic," was the composed answer, "and send her for a walk; or"—after a brief pause—"you can have the gig, and drive over to Coatham. Latchet would be glad enough to see you; and you might choose her a new bonnet at Mrs. Baker's—it's time she had one."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Miss Fowke, gazing at him with eyes great with amazement.

Whereupon he laughed, and went to work again with his porridge spoon. Of a truth fact is stranger than fiction.

But though John was honoured by no command to put the gig in readiness, an operation of some magnitude, the cushions pertaining to that ancient and pyramidal structure being, by reason of the rarity of its appearances, a quarter of an inch thick in dust, and every ring and buckle requiring forcible application of brush

and washleather, the idea of exercise as a stimulant and corrective of acrid humours struck Aunt Rachel as alike happy, and in accordance with past experience. To go to Coatham would involve much trouble, likewise the neglect of duty—moreover Mrs. Baker never exhibited her Christmas stock till the twenty-first or twenty-second, and, if you were going to spend money, you might as well get your money's worth; but a brisk walk on a nice mild day like this——

"I think," remarked she, as Tryphena—they had just been to look at a recently-constructed celery-bed—stooped to examine into the resources of a spreading violet plant which grew beneath the kitchen window, "that you don't go out enough. Let me see—Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday," checking off each day on her fingers; "five days, and you have never stirred outside the house except just to go to meeting! That won't do!"

"Why not?" smiled the girl; "I am quite well."

"That may be. I don't say you aren't. Still, you should walk more. Now, how

should you like to go and see Clara Bond this afternoon?"

Tryphena seemed to consider. Then she looked up at the sky, which was cloudy.

"It will not rain," asserted Miss Fowke; "or if it does 'twill be no more than showers. Come!"

"I should like to go very much," was the ready answer; "I thought of it yesterday, but there were those feathers to be seen to."

"Very well, then," smiled Aunt Rachel, pleased at the issue of her questioning—her own way was very dear to this good woman, as dear as though she were a wealthy gentleman, with a big estate in Westmoreland, and for initials no other letters than R. V.—"you can start directly after dinner, and I will make her up a little basket; just a few rice cakes and a bottle of elder wine, and perhaps a pot of currant jelly or so. It must be bad to lie there, within sight of the new year, knowing it to be one's last."

"Yes, indeed!" replied Tryphena.

Yet had you pressed her hard, she being simple, would have told you that as she spoke she envied, could have so lain well pleased.

Life is apt to seem a little wearisome to one who, being sick of soul, must perforce spend her time in incessant and laborious trifling with trifles. It is as though a shipwrecked sailor cast on some desert island, with thunder of breakers, tempestuous roaring of mad wind, were, whilst feverish hope of deliverance consumed every other feeling, condemned to erect sand-fortresses, and play with the shells and seaweed scattered along the beach, as might some happy child.

CHAPTER XIV.

BY THE FRUIT OF HIS MOUTH.

INNER over—Mr. Fowke was away, having ridden off directly after breakfast, whither no one knew—the sun made his appearance, tinging the neutral-tinted clouds with gold, and the world put on a pleasant look.

"You need not stay long, you know," said Aunt Rachel, as she shut down the cover of the tightly-packed basket, and gave it to Tryphena, who stood ready shawled and bonneted at the open door; "she won't be able to talk much, I dare say, because of her cough; and don't take the dog: she might get at the cat, and that would make a fuss. Go in, Beauty."

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Tryphena, slipping her arm through the basket handle; "never mind, though. If I can get back in time, I'll take her for a run before tea. How strange it is that there is never a pleasure but disappointment must follow."

"Of course," replied Miss Fowke, picking a bit of white cotton from off the girl's shoulder—a tartan shoulder, and shapely—"what would you have?—backs without fronts, and rights without lefts? But do, for goodness' sake, mind how you carry that bottle, for if it breaks, your frock will be ruined."

"I'll take care," said Phenie; and trotted off down the path as brisk as you please. At the gate she looked back, nodded, and smiled. And Aunt Rachel smiled too, but gravely, with even a dash of sadness.

"He ought to write," exclaimed she to herself, as she turned back into the house. "It is quite wrong of him to be so neglectful."

For steadfast as was her belief in the cleansing power of Pain, the girl's meek

miserableness vexed her. She did not say anything, but it vexed her.

Once out of the Grange lane, with its ruts and roughnesses, Tryphena sped quickly on her errand. It was, as I have said, fine overhead, and the wind blew with quite southern softness, albeit the weathercock on the church tower pointed tremulously south-east; over the green and brown of the sun-kissed hills flitted light shadows thrown by each passing cloud; the little mill-stream gurgled and churned and fought its way from level to level, leaping at last into a broad, dark basin —kept cool in summer by the thick foliage of a great sycamore tree, and the home, so ran tradition, of a gigantic jack—with sauciest vehemence; the birds prattled and piped merrily, as though, duped by a deceitful climate, they fancied it was already February, and St. Valentine had arrived to heal the woes of hapless lovers.

A wondrous pleasant afternoon.

But, pleasant as it was, Tryphena looked nor to right nor left, walking on straight and steady, her mind set on the business she had

in hand; for the last time she had traversed that road he was with her—together they had listened to the brawling of the brook, together they had watched the cloud shadows play upon the hills, and it would not do to recall all that; that must be forgotten—buried, since he so willed.

Still, if alienated from the brightness which encompassed her, she had her good thoughts. Was it not right comfortable to reflect that, let private feelings, individual conditions, be what they might, to enter into the woes of others, to deal kindly with the afflicted, to sit by the bedsides of those who were sick and suffering, specially the bedside of one who, being young, would soon lie a corpse among corpses in the Wesleyan burying-ground at Coatham; to dwell softly, in tones tender and encouraging, on such subjects as were calculated to cheer a dying soul—for instance the mildness of the weather, the goodness of God, the text and fashion of the minister's discourse last Sunday—must ever remain no less a privilege than a duty.

Truly.

Ah, life could never be justly pronounced

valueless so long as it retained its present aspect, so long as the human body could feel pain, the human heart ache with distress, or throb quick with sympathy.

Arrived at Mrs. Bond's cottage—a tumble-down tenement, much like that inhabited by the Tapps, only smaller—Tryphena found that lady in the garden, a good-sized plot of ground, enclosed by a privet hedge—taking what she called " a walk round, just to get a mouthful of air, 'avin' been up all night with Clary," accompanied by Jimmy, her cat, a tortoise-shell Tom and gentleman of influence.

" Aunt," said Tryphena, when good-days had been exchanged, and the invalid inquired after, " has sent Clara some elder wine and a couple of pots of currant jelly, red and black, which she says is a good thing for the throat; and I found it so myself last winter, when I had a bad cold."

" Your aunt," replied Mrs. Bond, who was a thin, fair, sharp-faced little woman, with a long reddish nose and reddened eyes—reddened, people said, with constant weeping; she had been unlucky all her life long, had Mrs. Bond, her husband having been hung

for incendiarism, and her only son having drowned himself because the young woman he kept company with—Batt's granddaughter—saw fit to fling him over for a journeyman tailor who lodged at her mother's; they got married afterwards, and set up in business at Coatham, in the shop that used to be Baker's, by the market;—"your aunt," replied this much-to-be-commiserated person, dropping a curtsey, "is very kind, very kind indeed, and I'm sure Clary will be very grateful. Anything fresh do seem so temptin' when you're ill; and of course, though I do my best, I can't afford nick-nacks. But do 'ee step in and 'ave a bit o' chat with her; she's been quite lookin' forward to your comin.' The minister told us that you would call."

"Oh," said Tryphena, following Mrs. Bond into the house, "that was on Sunday, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Bond; "'e looked in after meetin', and right glad I weer to see 'im, for 'e do allays bring comfort."

"I think he is welcome almost everywhere," smiled Phenie, and they climbed the dark and crooked stairs.

Clara Bond was, as Mr. Latchet found occasion to remark no longer ago than last Thursday, "a very sweet-looking young creature." She was also a month older than Tryphena, and the most patient of suffering mortals, lying there in her small, none too soft bed, her eyes fixed for the most part on that heaven whither she believed in her simplicity she was bound soon to journey, her hands white, thin—so thin that you could almost see through them meekly folded on her breast—she was past knitting now—from week's end to week's end; never a complaint, a cross word upon her lips.

"No need for that gal to die afore jinin' the angels!" had asserted Mrs. Kipps, with emphasis, to her "maister," one evening, having just returned from paying her a visit.

When Tryphena entered the sick chamber—something less than an ideal or even picturesque sick chamber, mind you, being dim, ill-ventilated, and utterly destitute of those minor refinements, the result of taste allied to means, which so pleasantly mask pain, and clothe in garb decent, if not gracious, the bare hideousness of decay—Clara seemed to sleep,

lying on her side, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes closed.

"Hush!" whispered Phenie, as Mrs. Bond was about to announce her presence; "don't disturb her, 'twould be such a pity;" and turned back to the door.

But at that moment the girl awoke—she had only dozed—and smiled happily: the sight of a fresh face was to her strangely pleasurable.

"I were just a dreamin' that you'd come to see me," said she, raising herself on her elbow, "I've been expectin' you for days," and put out her hand.

"Have you?" smiled Tryphena, taking it in hers, and kissing her tenderly—they were old playfellows; "I would have come before if I had known that, but I have been so busy."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bond, shaking up the pillows—pillows stuffed with flock, scarcely luxurious—"so Martha told us. She's been down a'most every evenin', just to see what she could do. There's a deal o' good in that young 'ooman."

"Oh, yes," agreed Phenie, who had meanwhile possessed herself of a chair, and was now

seated at the foot of the bed. "I don't know anybody to equal her. She and I are quite like sisters."

"Now be you?" said Mrs. Bond, in a tone expressive of admiration; "but I knew she weer fond of you by the way she spoke. 'Tis always Miss Phenie does this—Miss Phenie does t'other.' Isn't it, Clary?"

"Yes," smiled Clara, and beamed on Tryphena lovingly with her great shining eyes, as much as to say, "And no wonder."

It was strange how very general was the esteem and affection lavished on this undeserving young person.

"Well," observed Mrs. Bond, at length, heaving a sigh, "I'll go and see about gettin' the tea ready, while you two 'as a bit o' talk. You'll stay and 'ave a cup, my dear? Yes, do! Miss Fowke 'as sent you some cakes and jam, Clary, and a bottle o' elder wine."

"'As she?" said Clara, a little languidly, sinking back on her pillows, "that be very kind of 'er, I'm sure; but every one do be so kind. See there"—pointing to a gray and somewhat shapeless object lying on the drawers —"that be a bird's nest that Dicky Ludlow

brought yesterday evenin'. I suppose 'e thought 'twould amuse me, poor lad."

"Fancy!" said Tryphena, and rose to examine the said token of solicitude—"how funny of him! and it is lined with bits of wool—blackbirds make their—— Oh!" breaking off short.

"What's the matter?" inquired Mrs. Bond; "you 'aven't run a thorn into your finger?"

"No," replied Tryphena, replacing the nest on the drawers, and facing round, her cheeks very pink, but her eyes grave to frigidity; "it's Mr. Latchet—he is at the gate;" and therewith the latch clicked.

"Run, mother!" exclaimed Clara, eagerly; "be quick! Oh, I'm so glad! Some'ow I thought 'e'd come this afternoon, because my chest's so painful, and 'e do generally come then, just to make up as 'twere; but"—panting pitiably, and turning to Tryphena, as Mrs. Bond hastened off down the stairs—"don't you go, Miss Phenie; 'e won't stay long; besides, 'tisn't as if you were strangers."

Tryphena stood irresolute. She did not wish to meet Acts; still less did she desire to linger in his company.

"Please don't go," meanwhile reiterated Clara; "'tis so seldom that I see you, and I may not last out till you can come again. Do you stay, that's a dear"—most earnestly—"I should so like for us to pray together just once more."

Tryphena, her ears full of footsteps, glanced nervously at the door. Was there ever anything so unfortunate?

"Ah, Miss Tryphena," exclaimed the minister, suddenly pushing it open, and appearing on the threshold; "so you have found your way here at last. How do you do?" advancing smilingly towards her.

"I am quite well, thank you," she made answer, her fingers in captivity, her heart all a-flutter.

"And how is our poor Clara?" pursued he, turning himself about, and laying his hand on the girl's sharpened shoulder; "any better, my child?"

"No, sir," she smiled, "except when you be 'ere."

"The doctor," observed Mrs. Bond, who, followed by Jimmy, had just entered the room, "said the last time 'e come, that weer

Monday, that if she could but get over the March winds 'e thought she might p'r'aps take a turn for the better, and recover entirely."

"The March winds!" echoed Clara, with a touch of contempt— "but don't let's waste our time talkin' of that which can never be. I'm content, and I'm the one it matters to. You've got a Bible with you, sir?"

"Yes," smiled Acts.

"Then," coughing, "sit you down and read a bit—read 'ow that there was in the right hand of 'im that sat on the throne a book written within, and on the backside sealed with seven seals. I'm never tired o' 'earin' about that. I do wake up in the night and it do all pass before my eyes as clear as though 'twere painted on calico, like them blinds in rich folks' 'ouses. 'Tis," coughing again, "in Revelations."

"Yes," said Acts, and sitting down read—read with effect, emphasis, yet so softly withal that his voice stole into the ears as water into a vessel already brimming; and through the grand words fell ever and anon the low note of a passing bell, tolled by Baruch Tucker, the

sexton, for some churchman or churchwoman who, being unlearned, knew all.

Listening, Tryphena sighed. It was as though the hand of God Himself struck a full chord on that many-stringed lyre we call Humanity.

The girl's heart was stirred.

And in this way Acts had the mastery over her. Think you he knew it not—he who wrote on men's faces as I write on this paper now, he for whom all deeds good and bad were fraught with interest akin to that felt by the pathologist in the dissecting room, all ways, dark and light, provided the excitement attendant on exploration?

Yet his eyes sought not hers; when the chapter was ended no word suffered he to escape his lips.

"Pray!" whispered Clara, her hands joined together, her face quite radiant.

And he knelt down and prayed, as it were at the gates of heaven, and rose up again, still silently.

He had thought out all this.

"Oh!" exclaimed Clara, when renewed quiet had in a measure diluted rapture—"if

that could but last for ever! Now, wasn't I right to persuade you to stay?" addressing herself to Tryphena; "fancy, sir, she wanted to be off directly you come, just as if you were a complete stranger."

Mr. Latchet smiled.

"It was not that," exclaimed the girl, hastily; "I was afraid of being late. Aunt does not like me to be out after dark. But I am glad I did stay, first, because you wished it, dear, and secondly, because it has done me good."

"Ah!" smiled Clara.

"If you will allow me," here observed Acts, pocketing his little Bible, rich in marginal inscription, "I will walk with you as far as the turning to the Grange. Our roads lie together up to that point."

Tryphena looked away at the window. She had no wish for his society.

"The afternoons are so short now," continued he, placidly, as though furnishing himself with a reason why he should make the offer, rather than showing cause for her acceptance of that same.

"Oh, but," exclaimed Mrs. Bond, "I thought

you were a-goin' to stop and 'ave your tea?"

"Thank you," replied Phenie, gravely, "I am afraid I mustn't do that, for I see that the sun has already set."

"Yes," said Acts, "set temperately in gray and amber, as becomes a sun in his old age. Good-bye, my child," holding out his hand to Clara, who clasped it in both of hers, and pressed it to her lips. It did not matter what she did now, she was so near the edge; and she had ever set store on him, carrying him little bunches of spring flowers in their first loveliness; primroses rifled from mossy nooks, inaccessible, unknown to the vulgar explorer as the heights, plains, and seas on the other side of the moon; violets whence the snow had scarce melted; snowdrops, her flower, she said, part good—that was the white, part bad—that was the green—and wholly drooping, watched from first peep of leaf zealously, as though each glistening bud were worth an emperor's ransom; running his messages, shaping her small life in strict accordance with his teaching.

Tryphena chose not to see that impulsive action.

"Good-bye!" said she, in her turn, a little coldly, and seemed about to go. Then smitten with sudden shame (who was she to sit in judgment on the weaknesses—was it a weakness?—of her fellow-creatures; had she not kissed Robert's hands?—ay, devoured them with kisses; had she not put her arms round his neck, and laid her face to his? who was she, I say, to sit in judgment?), bent down and whispering, "I will come again very soon," pressed her lips on a soft crimson cheek, her eyes full of tears the while.

It was so sad.

"I fear," observed Acts, as having bidden adieu to Mrs. Bond at the garden-gate, whither she accompanied them, Jimmy still in attendance, they walked away up the road, "that I have laid myself open to a charge of intrusiveness; but really it is not safe for a young woman to walk alone through these unfrequented lanes, and——"

"One never can be quite alone," interposed Tryphena quietly.

Mr. Latchet lapsed into silence. Her simple piety for the moment quite dimmed his cleverness, only for the moment though.

"Don't let us walk so fast," said he at length, laying his hand upon her arm; "there is plenty of time."

"But no," she answered, "I want to take Beauty for a run. She has not been out for two whole days."

"Do I rank below Beauty in your estimation, then?" this, rather bitterly.

"No"—scarcely a fervent "No!"—"but you can walk when and where you please, and she can only go out when she is let. One ought to remember that."

"Oh," exclaimed he, throwing up his chin, "varium et mutabile semper fœmina—now honey, then verjuice; here melody, there discord!" and sighed.

To this splenetic outburst, however, Tryphena said nothing, trudging on, her big basket on her arm, her eyes on the ground, as though she had not another thought in her head save how to get home as quickly as might be.

"What do you think of Clara?" inquired the minister at length, quite in his ordinary tone.

"I think she is thinner than when I last saw her."

"That is very likely; you have not seen her for some months."

"Yes I have," was the prompt rejoinder, "I was there in November, just before——"

"Just before what?" questioned Acts, finding that she did not seem inclined to finish the sentence.

"It does not matter. I was there."

"You mean just before Mr. Valoynes returned?" he continued, with edifying coolness —coolness a little insolent, to speak the truth.

"Well!" retorted the girl, hotly, her cheeks flaming red as hollyberries, "and what if I do so mean?"

"Nothing," he replied, "only I am sorry to find that you still measure time by that most unfortunate occurrence."

"I do not call it unfortunate."

"Then you scarcely do justice to your own powers of judgment."

"That is my concern."

Acts' face darkened, and he bit his lip. He was not what is generally termed good-tempered, neither had he at any time much

stomach for incivility. It was by no slight exercise of that self-control which had more than once stood him in such good stead of late, that he constrained himself to accept this rebuff with dignity, and this notwithstanding the individuality of the offender.

She meanwhile tingled from head to foot with fright at her own audacity. To have spoken like that, and to the minister—the man to whom she owed not merely knowledge of sin, but spiritual being, who for miles was accounted——Oh, if she might but take to her heels and flee back to Mrs. Bond's—home—anywhere, so long as it were out of sight of this friend she had insulted, this benefactor she had——

"What can you think of me?" burst she forth at length, piteously, goaded to desperation by an avenging conscience, "whatever can I mean by behaving in such a way? I do not know what is the matter with me. I must be quite mad; but I am so unhappy. Oh? I am so unhappy, and it is not good to be always miserable," turning towards him a face made sweet with bitterness, uplifting to his, eyes voluptuous with sorrow.

At first it seemed doubtful if he heard her, so profound was his abstraction. Then, however, he looked round and smiled, a slow, faint, peculiar smile, beneath which Tryphena's cheeks paled, and her mouth fell.

"My dear," said he, mildly, "pray do not distress yourself, your petulance occasions me no surprise. As Shakespeare has it;

"'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.'"

"What do you mean?" she questioned, still white and scared looking.

"I mean," he answered, "that having once set your affections entirely on things unseen, and lived the life of faith, you, being now beset with cares of this world and the slave of passion, have retrograded—lessened—I only hope not irremediably."

"But," urged she, "I am no slave of passion. That means a person who thinks all manner of evil of others, and takes delight in being cruel and proud and selfish and everything that is horrid. I get into tempers, and say things I am sorry for; but I would not injure any one for the world. You speak at random."

Mr. Latchet shook his head.

"I wish I did," returned he, restraining a smile with some little difficulty; "it is, I can assure you, a great grief to me to witness your changed condition."

"And all," cried she, waxing passionate again, "because—because—— You are most unkind. You would not have——" but there she paused. "You would not have discovered any change in my condition if I had liked you," was on the tip of her tongue, and that might not sound maidenly.

"No," said Acts, calmly, divining the drift of her reflections, "I should not. You are quite right; but between a certain individual and my unworthy self no comparison can, I humbly hope, be instituted. I trust that I am neither an infidel nor a socialist."

"Names matter little," rejoined Phenie, scornfully; "you may call Robert what you like. I know him to be as good and upright and kind a gentleman as ever trod, and God, who can see into his heart as well as yours, knows it too."

Mr. Latchet sought strength in silence. To be candid, the girl's sudden vigour per-

plexed and startled him. And yet he was not wholly displeased thereat. The subjugation of this fierce, beautiful, small creature would be a task alike exciting and productive of amusement.

"I will tame her," thought he, teeth set, "so thoroughly, that she shall hunger for a smile—shall crawl meekly to my feet to beg for a kind word. The man fears and obeys me; so shall she obey and fear. It is the same spirit. A year hence, my lady—a year hence!"

And yet all the while he loved her—at the very moment that anticipation was thus working in his mind, would cheerfully have given ten years of life—life at its best—to hold her in his arms, to feel his lips on hers. Verily the soul of man defies line and plummet.

"What I wonder at," observed he at length, as they toiled up a slight hill—he might not be able to converse with her privately again for weeks—"is that you should be insensible to your own deterioration. For instance, six months ago the bare thought of dealing lightly with the name of the Almighty would have filled you with horror."

"So it does now," was the undaunted answer; "neither have I done so. It is not blasphemous to speak the truth, I hope," with some sarcasm; "but don't say any more, please. I am so tired," sighing wearily—"so very dreadfully tired!"

"I am sorry for that," returned Acts, gently, "I am always sorry whenever anything happens to grieve or trouble you. You do not believe me, but it is quite true. Nevertheless, as a Christian man and your pastor, I cannot possibly allow you to walk blindly over a precipice, at the base of which seethes hell, without making at least one effort for your rescue."

"Perhaps 'twas you who got father to turn him out of doors then?"

Acts paused.

"Mr. Fowke knows my opinion," replied he, at length; "it would be surprising if he did not, seeing how often and how clearly it has been expressed in his hearing."

Tryphena remained silent. This was true, but was it the whole truth? Who could say? And it was done now. There was no use in raking over old miseries.

"You see," pursued Acts gravely, "we must reap as we sow. By lending an ear to the insidious persuasions of this stranger—I have no wish to offend your delicacy—you have done your best to bring ridicule on those principles and hopes which I do really believe you in your heart still cling to. But God may not be mocked; the Most High shall make ashamed the countenance of the scorner."

"Do you mean that my unhappiness is the fruit of my own doings," questioned she quickly—"that it is a punishment?"

"Certainly I do. You may not be able to see it in that light, because your eyes are darkened; but I can see it, and I see also that until you, having flung your idol to the winds, seek the Throne of Grace penitently and in deep contrition, you must not hope to regain either the divine favour or temporal ease."

Tryphena compressed her lips, over her face stole an expression of the profoundest hopelessness.

"The flesh is weak?" he smiled.

She shook her head.

"Well," said he, laying his hand upon her

shoulder—they had reached the top of the lane —"I will not be too hard upon you ; only promise me that you will be humble, that you will pray to be counselled—directed."

But she made him no answer. She wished to do what was right, had most zealously endeavoured to do what was right ever since she came to a full understanding of what right was, yet——

"It is so puzzling," said she at length.

"Not at all," he returned; "not in the least. If you will only clear your mind of delusion, and"—pausing tellingly—"prejudice."

But she stood silent.

So he left her—left her to grope her way down the dark lane as best she might; to grope her way through her perplexities as best she might. He would set it all straight some day.

Yet was he not quite proof against the sly hits of malicious Chance, for he had not gone many yards when it suddenly occurred to him that in his zeal he had forgotten to inquire whether Robert had yet written—a sufficiently grave oversight.

"I do not think he has, though," reflected

he after a while, "or she would not have seemed so depressed. Besides, it is not her habit to be cautious; she would have told me. No, he has not been heard of. Still——"

Chance scored.

"Well," said Miss Fowke, as the back door opened, and Tryphena reappeared beneath the roof of her forefathers, "and much heed you've paid to what I told you about not staying long! But—Lord, you look as if you'd just seen a ghost!"

"I am tired," said the girl, dropping heavily upon a chair, while the basket rolled off her lap on to the floor; "I——"

But her voice failed her, she buried her face in her two hands and sobbed aloud. And Aunt Rachel stood and gazed on her.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed she at length, in a tone of irritation—"what works, what works!"

CHAPTER XV.

"WAS IT MYRTLE OR POPPY?"

"HERE," observed Tryphena, looking up from a pie-dish full of raisins, the which she was engaged in stoning, in anticipation of Christmas, about half-past eleven on the following morning, "is Martha, and," nodding and smiling, "she has got a letter in her hand; she must have met Isaac in the lane. Do go and see what it is, aunt, my fingers are so sticky!"

"It'll be nothing," replied Miss Fowke, who having just administered a severe pinch to her right thumb while shutting a drawer in the dresser, was not disposed to take a cheerful view of things; "maybe a notice of law-proceedings from Hickman. I've told your

father all along that he'd better mind what he was about with that fellow. Thirty-six pounds for seed in one quarter; did any one ever hear of such a thing? Well, Martha," as the door opened, and that robust and rubicund personage presented herself to view, her little brown eyes dancing with merriment, her red full lips parted in a broad happy smile—"how are you this morning? Tryphena said you were coming, and that you'd got a letter for us!"

"Yes!" returned Martha; "I've got a letter for ee, sure enough, and of the right sort, too. See there!" holding up a big yellowish document, sealed lavishly, and addressed in large, firm characters, essentially masculine.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tryphena, her face ablaze—"at last!" and then fell trembling, so that she was glad to sit down on the chair Martha pushed towards her.

"Well!" said Aunt Rachel, eyeing her sarcastically, "and who's it for, this grand concern which causes such commotion?"

Martha laughed.

"'Tis for you," she answered, laying it upon the table; "sweet'earts weren't so cautious in my time."

Tryphena clasped her hands. What was about to be revealed? Had he changed his mind? Did he——

"The letter which he posted last Saturday!" exclaimed Miss Fowke, who had already plunged into the unknown, "what does he mean? We've had no letter!"

"A letter!" cried Tryphena—"a letter! Then he did write! My dear!" smiling rapturously, "how could I doubt you for one moment?"

"That's all very fine," rejoined Aunt Rachel, tartly, "but the question is, what has become of it? I wonder whether Isaac's quite out of reach? Dothering old creature! As likely as not it's at the bottom of his bag all the while."

"I can catch him," exclaimed Martha, rushing to the door, "I'll run faster than he can walk any day;" and therewith fled down the garden path and out at the gate, precipitately, as though pursued by demons.

"Just fancy!" remarked Aunt Rachel, stepping to the window to look after her, the letter in her hand.

"Oh, but," exclaimed Tryphena, "to think

that he has not quite given me up—that he did have a thought of all we must be feeling, you and I; because you know you are just as fond of him as I am, only in a different way"—("I should hope so" interpolated Miss Fowke, with some frigidity)—"Is it not lovely —exquisite—enchanting!" clasping her hands, palms outwards, across her eyes, rocking herself to and fro, and laughing—laughing so that you would weep to listen to her.

"If you don't take care," observed Aunt Rachel, gravely, "you'll be in strong hysterics in another minute. Sit up"—shaking her by the shoulder, as one might a cushion—"sit up, and compose yourself, and act like a rational creature. I don't approve of such mad ways."

Thus stimulated, Tryphena cut short her paroxysms, opened her eyes, and leant back in her chair.

"What does he say?" inquired she, languidly; "where is he?"

"He is on his way home, and he says—— But there, you'd best see for yourself," tossing the letter open into her lap, "I must go and speak to Isaac."

"What," exclaimed Tryphena, "has Martha caught him already?"

"Yes," rejoined Miss Fowke. "He couldn't have got out of the lane;" and hastened off whilst speaking.

Left to herself, Tryphena set her elbows on her knees, framed her face in her hands, tucked up her feet on the carven rung of her chair, and with a great sigh of unalloyed happiness prepared to enjoy, to gloat over, to feast upon this most perfect, most thrilling of literary performances ever accomplished within the memory of man.

"Hen and Chickens Inn, Winchester,
Dec. 14, 1821.

"My dear Miss Fowke" (wrote Robert), "the letter I posted to you on Saturday will by this time have fully informed you of the method and manner of the first stage of my very melancholy journey.

"I have stayed on here partly in the hopes of hearing from you, and partly because I could not make up my mind to increase the distance which separated me from my darling. At times I got so restless that I thought I must have out Silvertail, and gallop back

post haste. 'Surely,' said I to myself, 'Mr. Fowke has changed his mind by now, and will at least listen to reason.' But these fits did not last long; for, to tell you the truth, my pride was a good deal hurt by your brother's behaviour. I feel that I have been treated unjustly. Had I been the most dishonourable scoundrel in the world he could not have used me worse. Let that pass, however. I do not doubt that the course of our true love will be ultimately cleared of all obstacles, and meanwhile my heart remains unswervingly steadfast. I shall never marry at all if I do not marry Tryphena.

"I did not sit down to tell you this, though, and indeed must beg you to pardon my garrulity, it being something less than needful to reiterate my intention of fulfilling a contract purely of my own seeking. What I do wish to say is that I am just about to start for Kirton. This morning I received a letter from my housekeeper, in answer to one I wrote at the same time that I wrote to you, telling me that Matthew Thwaites, my steward, has been taken seriously ill with inflammation of the lungs—so ill that he is not thought likely to

recover. He declares that he shall not rest in his grave—poor old fellow—till he has shaken hands with me again; so, as I should be sorry to put him to any unnecessary inconvenience, there seems nothing for it but to seek my native hills with what despatch I may.

"You must not think me unfeeling. It is my way to make light of troubles, pertain they to others or myself—a fortunate accident, I think, in the present aspect of affairs.

"But will you write to me at Kirton? My address is—'Kirton Hall, Ambleside, Westmoreland.'

"I shall probably get there on Wednesday or Thursday, so if you post a letter on Monday it may greet me on my arrival. And if my darling can, without encroaching on the rights of conscience, send me a few lines, how great will be my joy! I do not write to her now, because I cannot feel certain whose hands this letter may fall into, and I should be afflicted indeed were I, by my imprudence, to add to the weight of sorrow which I know already burdens her tender heart. But she is always with me—always in dreams by night—in memories by day. Oh, when shall my eyes be

again blessed with the sight of that sweet face? Soon, believe me—if will goes for anything in this witches' cauldron we call life. I must, however, check the zeal of my too ready pen. You see I am accustomed to empty myself into the bosom of your compassion, as the Papists say—and use is everything. Those three words remind me of Martha. Pray remember me to that good soul—she is quite dear to me, by reason—"

But here Tryphena seemed to pause, and from her face, hitherto instinct with pleasure just not mirthful, fled alike interest and intelligence. She sat staring at that inky network of lines and circles as at some foreign substance, the use of which she knew not, neither cared to know.

Gradually the sound of voices, principally female—old Isaac being scarcely equal to any very marked display of valour when exposed to a sharp and steady double fire from two such renowned engines of war as Misses Fowke and Tapp—increased in volume, and with a final salute of "Don't you do it again, though!" from the former lady, and "You

must 'a been a dreamin' I should think!" from the latter, the gate banged, and our victors marched briskly up the path.

"The idea!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, as she re-entered the kitchen, her face rosy with wrath and the caresses of a young and alert north wind. "Did you hear us, Phenie? I gave it to him—the old idiot!"

"Yes, that you did," came in Martha; "you blew 'im up fine, and 'e deserved it too."

"Poor creature," smiled Tryphena; "whatever has he done to be so flown at?"

"Whatever has he done, indeed!" echoed Aunt Rachel, aggrievedly—"why he's been and given Mr. Valoynes' letter to your father, that's what he's done; and if that's not enough to provoke one with him, I should like to know what is?"

The girl's eyes dilated, her lips fell apart, but no word said she for a while. Then she observed absently, even stupidly: "How odd! but father must have asked him for it."

"Suppose he did," retorted Miss Fowke; "what of that? Anybody may come and ask me for my head; it don't follow I shall cut it off to please 'em. But you take it very cool."

Tryphena sighed.

"Ain't you got no news for us?" smiled Martha, fancying that a diversion might here be fittingly effected; "no pretty messages? Don't 'e say one word about me, now?"

"Yes," replied Phenie; "he says that we are to give you his—his remembrances, I think it is. Yes," referring to the page before her; "'Pray remember me to that good soul,' that's you, you know;" and another prolonged respiration.

"Why, you'll blow the roof off," exclaimed Aunt Rachel, tartly.

"'Tis the fallin' o' the ball," said Martha. "the 'igher you do throw, the quicker it do come down again. 'Twill pass off."

Tryphena smiled.

"But about this other letter, aunt?" said she presently; "don't you wonder that father hasn't mentioned it?"

"No!" was the curt rejoinder.

"But it must have made him angry!"

"So it may have. Have you done with that one?"

"Yes," replied our dullard, and held it out valiantly.

Martha watched her. It was not natural, she thought, for any young woman to be so ready to part with that which had but ten minutes ago sufficed to endanger the correct balance of reason.

"I weer at Mrs. Bond's last night," remarked she, as Aunt Rachel re-applied herself to the consideration of Robert's hieroglyphics.

"Oh!"

"And she told me that you'd been there in the afternoon."

Another "Oh!"

"Likewise that the minister 'ad called, and that you walked 'ome together!" never relaxing in eye vigilance for a second.

Tryphena blushed. She, as you know, did not like being stared at. Besides, what did Martha mean by saying all this now?

"What's that?" questioned Miss Fowke, looking up, brows knit; "what about the minister?"

"Only that Miss Phenie and 'im walked 'ome together last night," returned Martha, composedly, re-ordering the fashion of her shawl.

"Indeed!" said Aunt Rachel; "you never said so!" addressing Tryphena.

"Didn't I?" responded the girl, carelessly—"I must have forgotten it. But I think I did, though, for don't you remember I told you that he read a chapter out of Revelations?"

"That was to Clara," was the ready answer, "I never have heard one syllable about his walking home with you till this very minute."

Martha's eyes twinkled.

Tryphena caught sight of them, and her pride flared.

"Well," said she, "and what if you haven't? Surely Mr. Latchet and I have walked together often enough to——"

"Mr. Latchet and you!" burst forth Aunt Rachel, contemptuously, and dealt with Robert's letter on such a wise that a superficial observer might have thought she meant to rend it in pieces.

"H'm!" ejaculated Martha.

Tryphena jumped up from her chair.

Did she want the man to walk with her? Had she asked him so to walk? What profit or pleasure had she got from his walking?

Was it a pleasant thing to lie awake for hours and hours, racked by doubt, tortured by fear, to be threatened with exile from heaven as well as woe here on earth, unless——

"You make a vast to-do about nothing!" exclaimed she, quite angrily, seizing on her stoning-knife; "I should think my face, when I came in, must have shown pretty plainly the amount of my enjoyment, let who would be with me."

"Why," said Martha, "weer you a cryin', then?"

But Tryphena made her no answer. She felt as though she could well bear never to speak to her again.

For a while they continued thus, Miss Fowke reading her letter; Tryphena revealing the interior arrangements of "best Catalons" with dexterous rapidity little short of merciless; Martha glancing now at one, now at the other, in a manner indicative of, if not perturbation, at least anxiety.

"Don't you be cross, Miss Phenie," said she, presently, pressed by reflection to utterance. "I'm sure I didn't mean no 'arm; I weer only repeatin' what was told me."

Still silence.

"Oh, let her alone," observed Aunt Rachel, "she'll soon come round when she finds that her tempers matter to no one!"

"Yes, but," said Martha, "I see no cause for 'er to 'ave a temper, now that she's got 'er 'eart's desire. What d'ye mean by it, you naughty girl?" marching up to the delinquent, and catching her tightly by the arm.

"Don't!" exclaimed she, pettishly. "Do you want to make me cut my fingers?" but her voice quavered.

"There!" said Martha, coaxingly—you might have fancied that she was addressing a pinafored urchin, whose head was just on a level with the table; indeed, Miss Phenie never would have outgrown "pinbefores" for her—"I knew you weren't really offended; but you know you oughter be as sprack as a cricket. Lor, if I were to get news of——"

"You would make yourself rather more silly than you usually do," came the dignified interruption; "no, I'm not going to be kissed and pawed, after—after you've said what you have. Go away! I—I—I feel very miserable!"

18—2

"Pooh!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, folding up the letter, and thrusting it into her pocket. "Get on with your work; you're as full of fancies as an egg's full of meat, and of late you've got that touchy and disagreeable, that one might as well live with a porkypine. I've put up with it as yet, because I thought you'd some excuse; but now that's done with, and if you give me any more of your airs, I shall pack you off to sulk in the garret—mind that! Now, Martha, what is it you've come about? I've wasted enough of my time for one morning."

"I thought I might as well begin on them curtains, if you could let me 'ave 'em," replied Martha. "I've not got much to do to-day, and they'll take some time."

"Very well," said Aunt Rachel. "Will you work here or at home?"

"At 'ome, please, 'm. I shall be able then to set down whenever I've got a chance."

"Very well," reiterated Miss Fowke, "I'll go and get them, then. They're in the parlour," and hastened away therewith.

"Don't 'ee be cross," entreated Martha again, when privacy was assured. "You

shouldn't never take offence weer offence was never meant."

"But you knew that aunt would be angry, if she thought I had been keeping anything back from her," returned Tryphena, quickly. "Not that I did—wilfully, at least. I was very tired when I came in, and I did not care to talk, but I believe I told her—only she took no notice. I do not like mischief-makers."

"No more do I," retorted Martha, "and that's why I spoke. 'Twon't do for you to be philandering about with that old fellow after dark, Miss Phenie—folks'll talk. There was Widder Bond with 'er mouth wide open, and chock full o' foolishness; but I soon shut '*er* up. I reckon I know as much as she does, any day. But that's the way tales is made, and you wouldn't like, when Mr. Valoynes comes back—as come back 'e will, for certain—for 'im to 'ear that you'd been——"

"Sh!" interposed Tryphena, "there's aunt;" then in a low grim tone: "You are talking about that of which you know nothing."

Martha stared, but abstained from remark. Indeed, the entrance of Miss Fowke at that moment, enveloped in ebullient masses of red moreen, peremptorily negatived all possibility of further speech not unemotional, and in another minute the momentous considerations connected with tops, bottoms, rings, fringes, and linings had attained such prominence that all less serious matters—matters personal, hypothetical—gradually faded from the mind as faces seen in a crowd, or the names of the tribes who swelled the host of Attila.

"And you'll let me know if you've not got binding enough," observed Aunt Rachel, when, each detail having received extended criticism, Martha proceeded to fold up her work, preparatory to taking her departure.

"Yes, 'm," replied she.

"Because," searching for a pin, "I shall be going into Coatham next week, and then I can match it for you."

"Going to Coatham!" echoed Tryphena; "whatever for?"

"To buy you a bonnet," somewhat fri-

gidly, "your father says you're to have one."

"Dear me!" said Tryphena. "I didn't think he knew that I wore such a thing even."

Martha laughed.

"Ah," said she, "you're not the first 'oo's been took in by their own cleverness; but if I were you I'd 'ave a blue silk, drawed, with a white rose or two; that'd become you sweet, now wouldn't it, Miss Rachel? and I know Mr. Valoynes likes blue, for I 'eerd 'im say so one day. 'Blue,' says he, sticking 'is fingers in 'is waistcoat pocket——"

"Oh, do hold your tongue!" cried Phenie, frowning and smiling, and shaking her head distractedly. Aunt, tell her to go—to go at once—my head aches with her nonsense."

"Yes, be off," exclaimed Aunt Rachel—"be off directly, and let me get on with my work. Twelve o'clock and not a potato peeled, or the fire made up, or anything. A pretty taking the master would be in, if he chanced to catch us like this, all sixes and sevens."

And Martha went mirthfully; but though

a smile wreathed her mouth as she walked down the garden path, her face, when she turned into the lane, was grave.

"The old rascal!" muttered she to herself—"the old fox!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BEFORE THE WIND.

" WONDER," said Aunt Rachel, as dinner-time approached, and the satisfactory progress of culinary operations liberated conjecture, "whether your father means to come home to-day? Really, it's never safe to make sure of anything he's got to do with. I never knew such an uncertain-tempered man in my life!"

Now, considering the narrowness of the speaker's acquaintance with masculine methods of thought, this width of assertion might very fairly have been termed anomalous; and so Tryphena would, I make no doubt, have termed it, only at greater length, had not the words popped in at one ear and out at the

other before she had time to catch their meaning.

In good sooth, this very snappish and prickly young person was scarcely herself this morning, a remark, the reasonableness of which will, I am sure, be instantly apparent to you who know her, you, my best of friends, who have toiled hitherward through the dense brakes, over the delusive swamps, up the steep ascents of this humble history. As yet she, favoured by circumstance, has exhibited, if not sweetness, still a meekness under provocation just a little praiseworthy. I do not say very. It was as natural to her to be gentle as it is to you to be brilliant, or to me to be stupid; but we none of us, as Martha was wont to observe, "can tell what we may come to." Bruised affection exhibits itself variously in various cases; one takes to his bed, another to his brandy-bottle, a third to his violin. Tryphena had nothing to take to. She could not strum on the piano all day, having no piano to strum on; neither could she read novels, she had no novels to read; neither could she wear a dressing-gown and refuse to do her hair; nature had provided her with

the hair, to be sure, but Providence had withheld the dressing-gown, and there was Aunt Rachel; so, her grief being denied all polite and legitimate outlet, turned sour and vented itself in small splenetic bubblings and fizzings, amusing or the reverse, according to the humour of him or her who did her the honour to gaze thereon.

For that she was grieved lies without the boundary of doubt, and specially, now that her love had transformed itself, or been transformed, into a rock of offence, a stumbling-block, which, tripped over, might hurl her to the lowest depths of that pit whence doth proceed smoke as of a great furnace. If you ask me point blank whether she actually believed with her whole heart that such would be the infallible result of continuing steadfast in that hope, that faith, which at first sight had charmed awakened sense as the bright splendour of young day, one tired of night—I can but answer, No! With all her reverence for others—which reverence occasionally led her into the committal of gross errors, as is the way of reverence, I fear—Tryphena was no fool. In a measured degree she possessed

that gift of clear-sightedness for which Miss Fowke herself had been renowned from the earliest days of childhood.

Still, the very cleverest of us may not in a moment wrench off that outer shell of impression, wherein we do live and move and have our being with more or less success according to the power that is in us, of ourselves. For three years, and those three years the most fruitful of her life, she, Tryphena, had accepted Mr. Latchet's decisions as irrevocable, be it a pot of jam that he passed judgment upon, or a divine utterance. "But the minister says so!" had always been her citadel, her big mud hut fenced with earthen breastworks, to which she, poor little savage that she was, might run when ignominiously worsted and threatened with annihilation. Surely it is not to be wondered at then that she shrank from demolishing this most prized of refuges, did piteously desire with big sorrowful eyes and a mute sad mouth that some one else should strike the first blow.

But she loved Robert. Come weal, come woe, she loved Robert; could never cease to love him, were she to bid him to forget her a

hundred times, to implore him upon her knees to be fickle, untrue, heartless, as by so being he would not only renew her modest graces, but give her strength—the sort of strength bred of a spur—to press on to the celestial city whither she had been bound when he crossed her path, even as the Flatterer crossed that of Christian and Faithful. And matters standing thus, she was of a truth very desperately unhappy, not knowing whether to turn to the right hand or to the left, whether to advance or retreat, feeling certain of nothing, save that it was impossible to stand still. Really 'twas quite natural, and warranted by daily experience, that the Shining One should with a whip of small cords scourge those silly pilgrims for their weak dalliance with "that man black of flesh, but covered with a very light robe." Bunyan was evidently a keen observer, almost as keen as Robinson Crusoe.

"Didn't you hear me speak?" observed Miss Fowke, after a brief pause, finding that no reply was vouchsafed to her previous remark. Nothing irritated this good lady more than abstraction, unless it were the honours

paid by a grateful public to persons distinguished by the possession of gifts not general —gifts artistic, administrative, rhetorical.

"No," returned the girl, "what did you say?"

"I said that I wondered if your father meant to dine at home to-day."

"You needn't do that," was the mild rejoinder, "for here he is!" and therewith a vigorous scraping of boots made plain the face of fact.

"Dinner ready?" inquired Mr. Fowke, flinging open the door with such violence that it shook upon its hinges, and throwing his hat on the couch.

"'Twill be in a minute," answered Miss Fowke, composedly; "are you in a hurry?"

"Yes," he answered, "I must be at Chadlington by three. I've just seen Hickman's man, and he says that if I'll give him a call he'll go into the matter."

"Ah!" smiled she, "I dare say, now that he finds you won't be played the fool with. Why didn't he write, I should like to know?"

"How can I tell you?" was the contemp-

tuous answer. "Iv'e got enough to do to mind my own business, without finding reasons for other folks' actions. There weren't any letters?"

Tryphena here took the key of the cider-barrel from its accustomed peg, and, jug in hand, departed cellarwards. She would like, she thought, to shut herself up in that murky home of rats, and mildew, and huge black spiders, whose legs crackled as they ran, causing the hair of nervous persons to bristle, and horrific visions to invade the mind, till the click-click of Brown Peter's hoofs should intimate that, for a while, at least, a young woman might partake of the bread and water of affliction in peace and quietness.

But what one wished to do seldom tallied with what one did, even when the horizon of desire stretched no further than absence of light, semi-suffocation, and companionship with vermin.

"There weren't any letters?" reiterated Mr. Fowke, when he had set himself a chair, and cut three hunches of bread, and peered into the mustard-pot—a rump steak, well smothered in onions, formed the staple of the ensuing repast.

But Aunt Rachel only looked about for a fork wherewith to transfer the spitting, hissing object of her care, from gridiron to dish.

"Well?" said Jacob, smiting his horn-handled knife upon the table, "are you deaf?"

"No," she replied, "but I don't see what reason you have to be so curious. If there had been a letter for you, you'd have had it."

"That's all very fine," he returned, "but I'm not the only person who lives in this house. There's you and Tryphena."

"Well," replied she, composedly, "and what if there is me and Tryphena?"

"You may have letters as well as any one else."

Miss Fowke smiled.

The master's face darkened, he plunged his hands into his breeches pocket.

It was a dashed bit of ill-luck that he had missed Isaac that morning, after waiting about for him for a good quarter of an hour, too.

"I thought I'd put an end to that," remarked he at length, gloomily.

"I dare say you did," came the tart response, accentuated by the sudden settlement on the human nose of a molecule of boiling fat; "but you see," applying friction to the injured member, "grand as you are, you can't quite command what happens hundreds of miles away; and another time," waxing still fiercer, "I'll thank you to keep your hands off my property. I don't meddle with what belongs to you—don't you meddle with what belongs to me!"

Jacob knit his brows.

"If you think," said he, at length, "that I'm going to have that fellow writing here, persuading my own flesh and blood to rear itself up and set me at defiance, you're very much mistaken. A pretty spirit he must have to do it, too, after the way I served him!" sneeringly.

"The way you served him!" echoed Aunt Rachel, setting the dish on the table, with a thump—"the way he let himself be served, rather. Why, any other man would have horsewhipped you within an inch of your life, and flung the whip at your head afterwards!

I know I would. The idea of your daring to sit there and glory in your shame!"

But her wrath fell pointless.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Fowke; "what a pity 'tis they've lost the key of the iron muzzle! 'Twould have become you first-rate. Hark you, my girl"—turning to Tryphena as she entered the kitchen—"your aunt would have Mr. Valoynes break his whip over my back, and fling the bits at my head. Ha! ha!"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Tryphena. "What misery! Aunt!" with emphasis, "you must not say such things—really you must not. It is dreadful. It is enough to drive one silly!"

"'Twon't drive me silly," replied Miss Fowke, grimly, "for I shall pack up my clothes and take myself off before that happens. I set some store on my senses."

"You need," said Jacob, in a tone which might be taken to imply that she had little else to set store on, and then, rising up, pronounced grace. Words were of too frequent recurrence at the Grange to produce any

marked deviation from the track worn by Habit.

"My mind," thought Tryphena, as she seated herself at the table, sick at heart, with about as much appetite as the chair she sat upon, "will soon be as tough as a donkey's skin; and from the same cause—perpetual and vigorous thrashing!" and therewith a smile stole to her lips. She was wont to amuse herself in this inexpensive manner. Perhaps had she kept a diary it might have proved worth perusal; but she would as soon have thought of keeping a lion.

"Did the man write to you?" demanded her father, catching sight of her curved lips, and instantly accrediting her with reflections the reverse of dutiful—he, this worthy man, could not imagine the possibility of mirth which owed not its rise to the discomfiture or suffering of another.

"No," replied Tryphena, getting a little pink.

"Then he wrote to you?" turning to Miss Fowke.

"Yes," responded that lady, "he did; and very glad I was to hear from him."

"You were!" said Jacob, stolidly. "Then perhaps you'll be glad to leave this house—it won't hold two masters!"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Tryphena.

"You hold your tongue," was the stern command; "I've got a word for you, presently."

"And so you may have," broke forth Aunt Rachel, flinging down her knife and fork, and quitting her seat with as much noise as though she were two public schoolboys; "and you're a tyrant, and if it weren't for that poor child, I'd take you at your word, and walk across that threshold this very instant, never to come back, if I had to die in a ditch for it. But leave her I will not. I know you too well. Ah! you may grin—grin away, I say! D'you think you're going to domineer over *me?*" with the air of a Siddons.

"I'm going to be obeyed."

"Are you?" quoth she, loftily; "and by whom, pray?"

"By you and her"—indicating Tryphena by a jerk of the right elbow—"and everybody whom I choose should obey me. See"—with

a low, scornful laugh—"if you sing the same song three months hence."

"And why not?" she questioned.

"Ah!" said he, and laughed on.

Tryphena sank back in her chair, her hands dropped idly on her lap. She felt sick and giddy, and in her ears thundered a thousand cataracts.

Jacob eyed her contemptuously.

"Lost your appetite?" inquired he, possessing himself of the cider jug.

But she made him no answer. Indeed, she was scarcely aware that he spoke to her, so confused was she and weakened.

Aunt Rachel's face grew pitiful.

"Go upstairs and lie down a bit, my dear," said she, compassionately.

"Yes," mocked Mr. Fowke—"go upstairs, my dear, and lie down, and plan and scheme and plot how best to deceive and defy and make game of your own father, who's worked for you early and late, wet and dry, sick and well, ever since you were born or thought of."

"Oh, but," exclaimed the girl, stung to consciousness, much as is a jaded beast

made active by application of the lash, "you are quite mistaken—you misjudge me—you do, indeed. I will never deceive you; but if I were to say that I had changed my mind I should tell an untruth, and you cannot wish me to do that."

"What do I care about your mind?" retorted he, roughly; "you do as I bid you, and let any one set you on to do otherwise, at their peril. A fine thing, truly, to turn up the whites of your eyes, and declare on your bended knees that the Almighty will have all folks honour their parents, and sitting and standing uphold disobedience!"

"'Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged,'" exclaimed Miss Fowke; "'he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.'"

"Ah!" smiled Jacob, "'tis well known who's readiest to quote Scripture. But I've no time for arguing. You've got your orders. Obey or walk, which you like. It don't matter to me—not two straws. Where are my boots?"

Tryphena rose to search for them. He

might have dashed his fist into her face, she would only have wiped away the blood, and cried a little, and when she could breathe freely again, have prayed God to forgive her for having occasioned him to err; there was no limit to her faith in him.

Aunt Rachel, however, being of a quite opposite way of thinking, and, moreover, blistered with verbal vitriol, maintained a dignified rigidity of face and attitude, scarcely indicative of submission.

"I shall not break with Mr. Valoynes!" remarked she at length, as Tryphena discovered the paternal "Hessians;" "he is *my* friend, and my friend he will remain!"

Jacob rose to his feet.

"Very good!" he said. "You do well to be honest. Only," facing round, eyes, mouth, and voice alike instinct with scorn, "what can ye do? Tell me that. What can ye do?"

"Time will show."

"Ay," laughed he, "time will show. Time'll show a good deal more than you'll care to see, if I'm not mistaken. I promised my lord that when he came back I'd be ready for

him, and I don't often break my word," picking up his hat.

"Just think of that!" observed Miss Fowke, not without irony.

"Oh, aunt!" exclaimed Tryphena, when they were again alone, "what ought I to do—where has right got to? Hunt as I will I cannot find it, and it used to be so plain. O bewildered, forsaken, lamentable me!"

"That's nonsense," came the ready answer, "you're no more forsaken than I am; and if you're bewildered, it's your own fault. If Mr. Valoynes was not a good man—I'm not talking of his opinions, they're just nothing, the Truth remains the same, let men think what they will—I would not have let you accept him—indeed, I would not have had him in the house after he got well. But he is a good man, and he loves you with all his heart; and as you love him, I say, hold to him. Your father seems to have got some queer outlandish notion in his head—what about, gracious only knows; but he's so changeable that, some fine day, he may turn round, and bid you both get married as quick as the ring can be bought and a wedding-

gown sewn together; and men, the best of 'em, are kittle cattle: once set free, 'tis a job to catch 'em again, particularly when young, and handsome, and well off. So, I say, hold to him."

But Tryphena smiled not, neither in any way showed that she derived relief or satisfaction from this avowal. She merely passed her hand over her eyes, and turned to the disordered table.

"It is a great puzzle," sighed she, "I do not know what to make of it. But you'll have some dinner, won't you?"

"No, thank you," replied Miss Fowke, dryly, "I've had dinner enough."

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM PALE TO BRIGHT.

"COME!" smiled Aunt Rachel, redetermining the set of her Sunday cap, no longer garnished with blue ribbons, but all glorious with blonde edging, satin loops similar in tint to those bows and rosettes which you have already seen on her black satin bonnet, and a crimson flower, the correct classification of which would try the powers and add lustre to the renown of a Linnæus, "this seems something like old times—like what we used to be before there was such a deal of coming and going, and fretting and fussing. I must say, I do like my own ways."

The tea-tray, in full pomp of silver tea-pot and cream-jug, and blue and gold cups and

saucers, glittered beneath her fingers; on the table towered squarely a currant loaf, flanked by flying buttresses of rock cakes, "cannons" —a species of confection much in favour, owing to the warlike temper of the period—and "cocked hats," likewise a popular and suggestive specific against digestion.

Fronting the loaf sat Mr. Fowke, to his right beamed the minister, to his left smiled Tryphena. There did indeed seem a certain familiarity, a homeliness in the aspect of things as seen just at present.

"I should think you did," observed Jacob —"at least you like nobody else's."

Mr. Latchet laughed, and spread his handkerchief over his knees. He had discoursed that afternoon on the propriety, and even necessity—if the pure light of the Gospel was to maintain undiminished lustre, pouring its golden tide into every humble home, enlightening each darkened mind—of administering to the corporeal wants of those who had been selected by Providence as channels for its distribution. "The labourer is worthy of his hire," said this zealous shepherd, see the fourth chapter of Paul's

Epistle to the Philippians, the sixteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and certain verses from the tenth chapter of Matthew. Specially when scorning the lures of worldly ambition, he, apostle-wise, contents himself with lowliness, and the society of those beneath him both in respect of natural gifts and acquirements, in the hope that he may win one soul to Christ, comfort one heavy heart; and being energetic in the delivery of these salient truths, appetite had sharpened.

To "do justice" was the minister's firmest and last intention.

"Well," said Aunt Rachel, passing him his cup, "so long as natural liking don't clash with right, I can't see the harm of giving way to it. What do you say, sir?" appealing to her visitor.

"Certainly!" he replied; "but one should be careful to allow right due influence."

Mr. Fowke compressed his lips.

"Perhaps, then," said he, "you'll try the cake—right and liking's pretty safe to agree there, I think."

"Christmas gets close, don't it?" remarked

Miss Fowke, when plates being plenished, and cups sipped from, and their contents approved of, conversation became possible; "let me see, 'twill fall on a Sunday this year—to-day week. Dear! do you know I never thought of that before? I suppose it's because we've had no snow!"

Jacob smiled.

"There must be a reason, mustn't there?" jested he.

"The weather hitherto has certainly been most remarkably mild," rejoined Mr. Latchet, blandly; "I don't think I ever remember such a genial winter."

"Nor I," was the quick response. "For my part I don't like it; but I suppose I should think different if I was pinched for firing or laid up. By-the-way, that reminds me. I sent Clara Bond a dinner to-day. We had a couple of boiled fowls, and Tryphena thought she might fancy a wing. Martha took it; she was going down there."

"Thank you," said Acts; "you must try and give her a call during the week, Miss Tryphena. She was so delighted to see you on Thursday. I suppose you heard of our en-

counter?" turning to Aunt Rachel, and helping himself to a "cannon."

"Yes," replied she; "and I also heard of your walk"—this casting down her eyes and screwing up her mouth, and doing her best, in fact, to look arch, poor woman!

"What's that?" questioned Mr. Fowke, with his mouth full.

"I walked with Miss Tryphena to the top of the lane," interposed Acts; "our roads lay together so far as that; and I do not think it quite safe for young ladies to be out alone in unfrequented places after dark."

"Humph!" ejaculated Jacob—"why didn't you walk a bit farther, and get your tea? You might as well, while you were about it."

"Yes," observed Aunt Rachel, with meaning.

"I would have," he returned calmly, "if I had not been already engaged. Mrs. Chipper had kindly asked me to supper that evening, and they always sup at seven. So you see I had no time to spare."

"Ah!" smiled Aunt Rachel, "where there's a will there's a way. But I never heard that you were anywhere about till yesterday morn-

ing, when Martha happened to look in and say that Mrs. Bond had told her that you had left together. Tryphena came in looking like a ghost, and seemingly without a word to say for herself!" regarding that young person with fine intentness.

"I was tired," she said, hastily; "I had a headache."

Mr. Fowke smiled.

"Women's headaches," remarked he.

The minister stirred his tea.

"Yes," said he at length, as though thinking aloud, "Christmas will soon be here. Christmas, with its holly and mistletoe; its roast beef and plum pudding; its bell-ringing, and carol-singing, and kindly wishes, and all the rest of it. I wonder, now, how many barrels of ale will be broached at Kirton"—quite carelessly, quite naturally, out of the fulness of his heart.

"Not many," replied Miss Fowke; "indeed, I should doubt if there would be anything of the sort, for the old steward is ill, and I am sure Mr. Valoynes is far too feeling to make merry while one he values lies hard at death's door. Besides——"

"Then you have heard from him?" exclaimed Acts, in a tone of mild, even pleased surprise.

"Yes," replied Aunt Rachel, "we have."

"And where is he, if I may be permitted to ask?"

"He was at Winchester when he wrote. We ought to have had two letters by rights, but one went astray," gazing steadily at the master, who sucked up the remainder of his tea, and pushed his cup across the table as composedly as though unaware of her existence. What could she do—let her tell him that—what could she do? She might stare till her eyes dropped out of her head, and she might be as stubborn and defiant and perverse as ever she could stick together—but what could she do? "Where he is now, however," added she, after a brief pause, "is more than I can tell you. Do you mind its being weak?"

"No," said Jacob, "so long as it isn't too sweet. You dear creatures never know how to be kind enough!"

"Really," said Mr. Latchet, caressing his chin—"at Winchester. Well, I'm sure I hope he'll have a pleasant journey, poor fellow!

And so the steward has fallen sick. You mean that old man who was with his father?"

"Yes," replied Aunt Rachel.

"Really," said the minister again, and commenced upon his third "cocked hat"—those symbols of vainglory generally afforded him scope for the display of weakness.

"I suppose," observed he at length, smiling at Tryphena, who just then happened to look up—"that you'll soon be head over ears in evergreens. I remember last year you converted the barn into a perfect bower, you and Martha between you. Don't you recollect I came to see how you were getting on, and found you both seated on the floor, in the midst of two or three huge ivy bushes, like a couple of—of——"

"Owls!" broke forth the girl, laughing, despite her annoyance, for it seemed to her, being a little tender, and apt to wince at the lightest handling, that the excavation of these treasures of memory was something less than needful, seeing that everything was changed, he and she, and all that that past had had to do with.

"Nay," said Jacob, a queer smile flickering at the corners of his mouth—"doves!"

"Yes!" exclaimed the minister, "doves without a doubt. Like a pair of doves!"

"Dear, what rubbish!" expostulated Aunt Rachel; "just as though two young women couldn't put up a bit of green stuff without being compared to all the beasts and birds in creation. Neither do I approve of such fid-fadding. Seasons are seasons, but they come without ornament, and so they go. The Gospels don't tell us that the stable at Bethlehem was stuck about with holly sprigs."

"Bethlehem is not an English parish," smiled Mr. Latchet; "to decorate our homes and places of worship in commemoration of Christ's birth has long been and will ever be, I hope, a distinctly English custom. Besides, is there not a poetical justice in the idea? Jesus brought life, freedom, peace. We, in the midst of bleakness, do our best to simulate summer—summer in her plenty, summer in her joy. I really do not see how, when taken in that light, it is possible to object to Yule-tide bravery."

Miss Fowke sat silent.

"Well, perhaps not," admitted she at length; "still, I must say I prefer plainness."

"That is pretty, though," said Tryphena; "did you think of it yourself"—addressing Acts—"or have you read it somewhere?"

He smiled at her—one of those grave, sweet, singular smiles which won him such repute among women.

"It is an old and favourite fancy of mine," he answered; and then looked away at Beauty, who lay stretched out before the fire.

The girl's face saddened. He was so clever—so clever! If only he were some one who—never could marry, never could by any possible chance fall in love with any one except himself when habited in a black gown, with fine lawn bands at his throat, and a Bible in his hand—making plain the will of the Lord to rapt hearers; but—she shivered—as will shiver, so old wives tell us, one who walks over his or her grave.

Grace said, Mr. Fowke aglow with sense of renewal and satisfaction at the course events were taking; for if a girl walked

alone with a man, and praised him or his ideas, which came to pretty much the same thing, to his face, you were surely justified in supposing—in those shockingly tame and unsophisticated days when Madame Angot bonnets, Cook's tourist tickets, and *chic* lay embedded gem-wise in the recesses of the future, not far distant from the Atlantic cable, the Suez Canal, and divers other notable and gigantic and splendid enterprises—that a time would come when she, instigated by admiration, gratitude, proper feeling, what not, would willingly erase all traces of the past, tear-wrought or otherwise, and gladden a father's heart by the consummation of a union which ——Why, 'twas plain as any pikestaff;—yes, yes! 'twould all go smooth now—smooth as oil—Mr. Fowke, I repeat, exclaimed, smiling at the minister, and rubbing his hands till they crackled again, being horny :

"I'll tell you what, sir! 'Tis a fine night. I'll walk part of the way home with you if you like. I've not been out to-day, except to the barn."

But Acts looked a little doubtful. Despite his fieriness in the pulpit, and the swift and

incisive workings of his mind, he was, as you know, anything but rash, and this offer struck him as curious.

"Well!" observed Jacob, "you don't seem over and above desirous of my company."

"Perhaps," suggested Aunt Rachel, "Mr. Latchet's afraid that the night air might bring back your lumbago. Not that I think it would." She had her own reasons for saying this.

Acts looked at his watch.

"I am afraid," smiled he, modestly, "that I cannot accredit myself with so much forethought. I was, in fact, wondering how the time went. I thought it must be getting late. However, I find that it is only half-past five. So," turning to Jacob, who had been listening with apparent satisfaction, "if you really are inclined for a stroll——"

"Good!" he exclaimed; "I'll get on my coat. Tryphena, find me a neck-cloth. I can't stand the cold now, unless I'm well wrapped up. You see I'm getting on—fifty-nine last May. Thank you, my girl, and now my stick—must have a stick to frighten off the thieves. Ha ha! It don't do for a poor

old chap like me to go about quite unprotected."

"You talk of yourself as old," smiled Aunt Rachel, "but you wouldn't like us to call you so. Nor do I see why one should. As far as looks go, I see no difference between you now and what you were three years ago. Do you, Mr. Latchet?"

Acts shook his head.

"Not the least," he replied; "indeed, if anything, I think Mr. Fowke looks younger than when I first made his acquaintance."

"To be sure," agreed that gentleman; "in twenty years' time, if I live as long, I shan't have a gray hair on my head, nor a whisker on my face, and all the maids 'll be pulling caps to get me for a sweetheart," chuckling gleefully.

"Dear! dear!" smiled Aunt Rachel, rising from her seat, and giving him a little push by way of expostulation—a push whereat he laughed good-humouredly; truly this worthy man was in a rarely amiable mood for him to-night—"always making fun of people, and cracking your jokes."

"Well," returned he, "'tis better that I

should crack 'em than that they should go off unexpected, like damp squibs, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said she; "you've got queer notions of your own for certain. But I'd something to say. We're coming into Coatham on Wednesday"—turning to Acts, who was telling Tryphena how that he had recently bought a canary—a quite lovely canary, with a fine tail, and great vocal talent—a canary which he thought it just possible she might——

"Indeed!" he exclaimed; "that is fortunate. You will then"—with a smile—"be able to see my new acquisition. Fancy! I have actually started a bird, Miss Fowke, after all my protests against pet-keeping. What part of the day do you intend to devote to your excursion?"

"We shall start, if it doesn't rain, about one," she answered, "that will give us time to do our shopping and get back pretty early."

"But you will surely honour my humble abode with a visit? Oh, yes, you must. I shall be quite hurt if you don't. Luxuries,

I fear, I have none to offer you, but a cup of tea and a biscuit——"

"Thank you," she interposed, "you are very kind. I am sure we should be very pleased to come, but I am afraid that we should put you out. Bachelors——"

"But there is Mrs. Forbes," he smiled; "you don't call her a bachelor?"

What could they do but laugh, and be persuaded to avail themselves of hospitality so cordially proffered?

"One is glad of a rest, I allow," said Miss Fowke, when it was finally settled that, weather permitting, they should make their appearance in the ministerial parlour about four p.m., from that to half-past, on Wednesday—"and I've got a terrible lot of things to think of. Groceries, and ironmongery, and a bonnet for miss"—nodding at Tryphena—"and a dress for myself, and——"

"Ah!" said Jacob, "and never a penny to pay for it all!"

"Well!" retorted she, "you wouldn't have me keep you in pots and pans, would you?"

"Lord, no!" was the resigned answer, "you keep me in rags and tatters!"

Miss Fowke compressed her lips, as might one with whom fortitude grew scarce.

"Good-bye," said she, holding out her hand, "I dare say you'll see us about four."

"I hope so," replied Acts, tenderly squeezing her thick fingers; "I shall be looking out for you. I have so long wished to show you all my small possessions; and you won't forget Clara?" shaking hands with Tryphena.

"No," answered she, "I will go and see her to-morrow."

Then Jacob opened the door, and Mr. Latchet having put on his cloak—that cloak whereof the fashion sinned so deeply against Martha's sense of fitness—they went out.

The shadows held their own again.

Not for long though.

"Come," exclaimed Aunt Rachel, when a few moments had elapsed—moments spent apart, each separated from each by a thick wall of thought, than which no masonry was ever stouter—"don't let's dawdle like this. I want to write my letter before your father gets back;" and began to pile plates one on another with quite terrific vehemence.

"Do you mean your letter to Robert?" inquired Tryphena, meekly accepting the admonition, and busying herself in the clearance of the table.

"What other letter should I mean?" was the tart response; "put that jam in the cupboard!"

The tea-things removed, the hearth swept up, and Beauty by dint of vigorous entreaty allowed a saucerful of milk, into which Tryphena cunningly contrived to pop a rock cake during Aunt Rachel's momentary absence, Miss Fowke mounted on a chair, extracted her desk—a large one, and made of rosewood, moreover a memento of her twenty-first birthday, and precious—from the recesses of that cupboard whereto she bade Tryphena relegate the jam, and conveying the said substantial and somewhat coffin-lke structure to the table, got herself a chair, and sat down to indite that epistle, of which every word was as plainly printed in her mind as were the contents of my last instalment.

Tryphena betook herself to the chimney-corner, noiselessly, almost on tiptoe. Once, when a child, she had ventured to inquire

during the progress of a similar operation what had become of her "white rabbit with bells"—a toy whereon she set value—and had gotten a cuff on the head for answer. The memory was instructive. Besides, she had little inclination for speech. It would be much pleasanter to sit quiet, she thought, following the fortunes of Christian—a diamond edition of the "Pilgrim's Progress" reposed in her pocket—or seeing pictures in the fire, or stroking Beauty, than to talk to any one, except—except—and here the dear eyes grew dim, and the sweet mouth saddened—for she had wondered so, wondered whether it would be quite entirely wrong for her to send him just one little line, in her own handwriting, rather prim handwriting, between you and I, a trifle scrimpy, quite uncharacteristic—character was not made so much of in those days—whether—whether—whether——

"There!" exclaimed Aunt Rachel, after a brief space—the flow of language having been, for her, remarkably brisk, so brisk, indeed, as to test, and that somewhat severely, her orthographical and grammatical resources—

"I think that's everything. Would you like to hear what I've said?"

"Yes, please," said Tryphena, looking round, cheek on palm, one hand on Beauty's head, which lay against her knee—as pretty and delicate a little figure as could well be seen by firelight, candlelight, the light of nature, or any other revealing medium, even Dresden china, I conceive.

"Of course I don't pretend to enter fully into things," pursued Miss Fowke, coughing deprecatorily; "I haven't time for that; but just as an answer I think 'twill do well enough. 'My dear and honoured Sir'—I begin like that to show how I feel towards him—'I need not tell you how relieved we were to see your handwriting, for'—fancy, now I'd put 'fur;' dear, dear! how the pen does run away with one—'for we had quite made up our minds—that is, Tryphena and me—that we should never hear of you again. Now, however, we know better, and beg you to forgive us for having had such a thought.' I think I ought to say that much."

"Yes, certainly," said Tryphena, with emphasis.

"'Since you have been gone,'" continued Aunt Rachel, pausing to dot an i, "'it has been very dull. Phenie has not seemed herself at all. You were right not to write to her. Your first letter was *lost*. I expect you will understand what that means. I believe there is nothing for it but patient trust and prayer —I don't suppose you will think much of that, but I do. I am sorry to hear that Mr. Thwaites is ill, and trust that he will soon come round. The weather has been very changeable—one day mild, the next cold—but perhaps you are more settled. Christmas will soon be here. We have been talking of that this evening, and the minister wondered how many barrels of beer would be broached at Kirton. I doubted if any, knowing how matters were. It is a great disappointment to me to be obliged to write thus. We, as I said before, seem very dull. On Wednesday I and Tryphena go to Coatham to shop and have tea with Mr. Latchet—she wants a bonnet. Pray come back before it is worn out, and now'— unless you've anything particular to say?" looking round at Tryphena, and in the tone of a preacher about to pronounce the ascription.

The girl smiled, her eyes being bent upon the floor.

"Tell him that I shall love him always," replied she at length, "for that is only the truth, and the truth can never be wrong, spoken or written."

"Let me see," said Aunt Rachel, looking puzzled, and scanning the page before her, "'pray come back again before it is worn out. Tryphena will love you always.' That don't sound nice, does it? Suppose I finish first, and then add in a postscript: 'Tryphena wishes me to say that——'"

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed. There was a certain cruelty in this deliberate doing to death of strong sweet words.

So Miss Fowke resumed her pen.

"'And now,'" murmured she, her head on one side, her face full of effort—none of your hasty scrawls for her, looking for all the world as if a spider having crawled into an ink-pot, had straightway crawled out again, and proceeded to dry his legs on a sheet of note-paper. No! let capitals be capitals, and loops, loops, and pothooks, pothooks. There was nothing like clearness in this world,

whether of handwriting or intention. "'And now,'" murmured this much-engrossed lady, "'Believe me, with my best wishes, your humble friend, RACHEL FOWKE.—P.S. Tryphena would have me say that she will love you always.'

"There, will that do?" sticking the pen in the inkstand and looking round to invite criticism.

"Yes," said Tryphena, clasping her hands about her knees, "that will do very well."

It was so true that she would always love him.

END OF VOL. II.

BILLING, PRINTER, GUILDFORD, SURREY.





